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Restorative Justice in Schools: An examination of peace circles within Monroe High School

By

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A Thesis Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

in

Criminal Justice

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DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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Abstract

Literature suggests that restorative justice programs can have improved outcomes when examining recidivism rates and satisfaction levels of both victim and offender in many instances compared to traditional approaches. Partners in Restorative Initiatives implemented peace circles and community conferencing, both restorative justice programs, within James Monroe High School in Rochester, NY. The practice of peace circles within Monroe High School was explored in comparison to theory and current national and international uses of peace circles. This paper discussed the restorative justice approach of using peace circles within James Monroe High School in Rochester, NY and how it affected perceptions of safety, respect, violence, and communication amongst teachers and students. Through survey analysis, personal observation, and interviews, this paper examined if the use of peace circles improved school environment, enhanced relationships between students and teachers, and was an effective approach to discuss issues of delinquency without relying strictly on punishment.

What are Peace Circles?

The criminal justice system changes constantly. At one time it relied strictly on a punitive model within the courts; however, much of this has changed. A recent push toward restorative justice has emerged not only within police agencies, court rooms, and corrections, but within communities as well. Societal views concerning offenders have begun to shift and new approaches are being used to help both offender and victim without relying upon the prison system. Such views have helped develop numerous methods in facilitating mediation, restoration, and rehabilitation within communities.

Models in restorative justice have developed in differing locations. The court system has crafted programs such as drug courts, domestic violence courts, and community courts relatively recently. These efforts have been implemented due to a push to lower recidivism rates, decrease the prison population, and to keep low-level offenders within the community. Today, restorative practices are used within police agencies, prisons, and schools. Such adaptation has created a wide range of efforts in helping facilitate offender and victim healing through communication and understanding. While slightly different methods are used in different context, this shows just how useful and effective restorative practices can be. A prime example of this is in the use of peace circles.

Peace circles can be conducted in a variety of ways as is reflected in the literature; however, the program designed by Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PiRI) is fairly specific on how such practices are handled within Monroe High School in Rochester, NY. PiRI is a nonprofit organization that strives for the use of restorative practices within the court system and local schools. PiRI collaborates with the courts via the use of

community conferencing; a restorative practice that brings the offender and victim together, with support groups, to discuss the offense and how harm can be repaired. Community conferencing is often used for personal offenses while peace circles are usually broader and not one sole individual is viewed as the offender. Peace circles can be used to discuss a specific offense or offender, but ordinarily this is saved for community conferencing. PiRI is currently collaborating with other Rochester schools to implement peace circles and also to continually train staff within the process. The procedure used in peace circles is designed to become familiar to both students and teachers; therefore the program becomes comfortable over time and eventually handles discussions of serious issues as a group.

Under the design that PiRI employs, that is adopted from the Circle Keepers Manual (CKM), there are four stages to the circle: discernment, preparation, the actual circle, and the follow up (CKM, 2004). The discernment stage is the helps define the purpose of the circle. The circle will be created based on the group and purpose the circle will serve. This can range from promoting a fun environment, building trust, to discussion of a serious topic. Once decided upon, the area of focus will determine how the circle is conducted.

The preparation for the peace circle builds from the discernment stage in that it decides how the focus of the circle will be achieved. At this stage all materials that will be needed are gathered and guidelines are drawn. Such materials can include a specific talking piece; in other words an item that when held allows a person within the circle to talk while others remain quiet and attentive. A talking piece is commonly used within peace circles as it not only keeps order and respect within the circle, but can also help

keep the focus on the main topic. An example of this might be having a talking piece be a seashell for a peace circle that is discussing a pleasurable topic such as vacations or using a stress ball as a talking piece when discussing issues that may bother those who are participating. The general rules for the circle usually include only one person talking at a time, students can pass their turn if desired, and everything said within the circle is to be held confidentially. These guidelines are carried into the third phase of the circle.

The actual circle consists of different parts including the introduction, trust building, discussion of issues, and concluding with solutions (CKM, 2004). The introduction will often include the facilitator and co-facilitator leading the circle in a game or activity that helps to relax the group. These activities can include reading a poem or listening to a song. After the opening, the circle is led in trust building exercises by one of the facilitators. These exercises are often meant as ice breaking activities that help students feel comfortable and enjoy the process. Examples of these also include games or even storytelling, where each person is asked to tell an enjoyable story that relates to a topic picked by the facilitator. Next, after a few rounds of such activities, the main focus of the circle is talked about. This portion will often be where issues of deviance, bullying, or harm are discussed. This part of the circle does not usually occur until multiple circles have been conducted over time as it often takes weeks to build enough trust within a peace circle to be able to discuss topics of this nature openly. For this reason, such topics are not discussed until the circle is deemed able to handle it by the facilitator. After such a serious discussion, the circle can be led into the solutions portion, where each person can say how to fix the problem or harm. This activity only takes place if serious discussions are part of the circle, but is essential to peace circles to

include topics of that nature. The circle is closed through another activity that emphasizes what the circle was about. A closing can once again include a poem or a fun activity to remind students of what they did within the circle.

The last stage to a peace circle is the follow up (CKM, 2004). This portion of the circle is not always conducted, but can be useful to the process. The follow up phase is ordinarily used in more serious discussion where students desire to talk about the issue further or if the topic was not fully resolved. Such serious discussion can include topics of physical or mental abuse, or other hardships in students' lives. This is not used that often within peace circles because serious offenses where there is a definitive victim are almost always discussed in community conferences and not peace circles. Peace circles are more focused on the group rather than the individual.

Another type of restorative justice approach that is similar to peace circles is that of community conferences. Community conferences revolve around a specific offense, where there is a clear victim. Peace circles bring together individuals to discuss actions in general, where no single person is to blame. Peace circles are often used to promote discussion on a variety of topics such as fighting or safety issues, while community conferencing is used to facilitate discussion on one specific act.

Since the beginning of the 2008 school year James Monroe High School in Rochester, NY has used restorative practices in its classrooms. With new administration in place, the school chose to work with PiRI to implement a program to improve numerous issues within the school. In 2008, the current principle Vicky Ramos began using restorative practices to help combat issues over suspension rates, violence within school, and advancement in education. Currently Monroe has required teachers to be

trained within such counseling and leadership techniques to be able to facilitate classroom circles. These restorative practices are used together within Monroe High School. James Monroe High School caters to grades seven through twelve and according to the Rochester City School District (RCSD) in the 2009 to 2010 school year they enrolled 1063 students (RCSD, 2011). Eighty-five percent of the students enrolled are eligible for free or reduced lunch (“SchoolDigger”, 2011). This midsize Rochester city school averages out to having a 9.8 student to teacher ratio (“SchoolDigger”, 2011). Within 2008, PiRI helped implement and train staff members within Monroe High School in the use of peace circles and community conferences. Peace circles within the school revolve around discussion of general to serious topics. Monroe High School generally uses community conferences to address serious acts of delinquency that have a distinguishable victim and offender. Such acts have included fist fights and incidences involving weaponry such as knives. Community conferencing is conducted in a similar fashion to that of peace circles. This approach brings together victim, offender, and their supporters. Support for students usually includes parents or guardians. This method provides the victim with a chance for their voice to be heard on the specific act and how it has harmed them. The process is focused on the victim’s needs and what the offender can do to repair the harm done. Through active discussion with all party members, the community conference ends with everyone accepting a restitution agreement. The restitution agreement is a form that lists what the offender must do in order to repair the harm resulting from their actions. Within Monroe High School such a list may include detention, extracurricular activities, or counseling. Community conferencing is another restorative justice approach that is used to supplement peace circles within the school.

The practices used by PiRI and Monroe High School developed from indigenous people and has become increasingly used within society due to the transformation seen in the criminal justice system.

Literature Review

Models in restorative justice within the court system include drug courts, domestic violence courts, and community courts (Goldkamp, 1994; Welsh & Harris, 2008). The development of restorative justice within society was relatively recent. Much of its development was due to the decline in public opinion about the effectiveness of the “war on drugs” (Earle, 2002). Laws meant to deal harsh punishments succeeded only in mass incarceration of non-violent offenders who suffered from addictions. The high costs of incarceration and the negative effects of removing large numbers of community members, especially those in low income areas, were felt through the nation. These laws dramatically increased the prison population and created a push for an alternative. The first drug court was created in 1989 Miami, commenced modern day restorative practices (Goldkamp, 1994). Once such practices were implemented and proved effective through the use of peer support, counseling, and education, they became more widespread.

The recent notion of community justice embodied prison reform. Helping low-level non-violent offenders through social or public health services, instead of long prison sentences was viewed as more humane and less costly. With such programs available both inside and outside prisons, the hope was to cut down on prison population and recidivism rates by providing offenders with the help they needed.

Many of the ideals of peace circles and restorative justice developed from indigenous practices throughout the world. A common practice among Native Americans includes the use of victim to offender meetings to resolve issues. The Lakota and Dakota peoples use a mixture of community conferencing and peace circles to bring together their community (Gehm, 1998). When a disruption has taken place within their community, the elders bring both victim and offender together into a circle consisting of one to two elders, and other members of the tribes. The elder discusses the impact of the disruption on the community both symbolically and materially (Gehm, 1998). Over the next few hours or even days everyone in the circle explains their view without interruption. Once all have spoken, the group disperses while the victim and offender come to a resolution (Gehm, 1998). The group is then called back to hear the outcome and to decide if it is fitting. If not, further discussion continues until another agreement is reached and accepted (Gehm, 1998). The Maori in New Zealand also have similar practices with an emphasis on children and their value in the family. While such practices were nearly wiped out during colonization they have resurfaced and were successfully adopted and expanded at the state level in New Zealand to include juvenile delinquents and the development of a special police unit. The United States has adapted some of the aspects of this practice, as well (Morris & Maxwell, 1998). Studies in England found the vast majority of police organizations practice restorative techniques (“Resolution 36”, 2010).

Practices from indigenous tribes have been used as an example for PiRI. The program not only integrates the school community into discussions much like these tribes did, but also uses numerous indigenous rituals to begin such discussions. Practices from

the Lakota and Dakota have been modified through the years, but many of their ideals of healing and providing everyone with a voice still remains a main feature within such programs today.

This issue of incarceration affects everyone. The list of people ranges from offenders, families, judges, tax payers and communities as a whole. The use of incarceration breaks up families. An offender's child may develop a greater likelihood of committing a crime in the future (Blake, 2008).

Since the 1970's many differing community outreach programs have been developed for prisoner reentry. Examples of these outreach programs include a group called the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery (CCAR) that has taken upon itself the duty of counseling prisoners before and after their incarceration to programs in Hawaii that use restorative circles to ease inmates into reentering society. The CCAR relies upon the "Inner Circle" which is a support group within the prison system that works towards increasing an offender's knowledge about recovery from alcohol and other drugs (Askew, 2008). The CCAR's goal is to provide prisoners with an opportunity to gain the support they need and to help other inmates through support circles (Askew, 2008). Once out of prison, these offenders continue in this voluntary program to meet weekly. Much like the program in Connecticut is Hawaii's reentry program.

In 2005, a pilot reentry program was developed in one of Hawaii's minimum security prisons. This program's goal is to help inmates who are close to being released back into society through the use of restorative circles (Walker, Sakai, & Brady, 2006). The restorative circle approach brings in the offender, their family, and prison staff to create a written plan about the offenders' process of leaving prison. Once a list is

compiled, the next part in the process is to evaluate what needs to be done to repair the harm that the offender caused. This process hopes to repair relationships by using a “solution-focused” approach by developing a restitution and support plan for the inmate (Walker, Sakai, & Brady, 2006). The process hopes to improve the inmate’s confidence to succeed upon departure, but to also reconcile with victims and family members.

The program in Hawaii was examined through a survey of participants in seventeen circles (Walker, Sakai, & Brady, 2006). The evaluation had participants rate the program through a five point scale ranging from having a very positive view of the program, a mixed view, or to a very negative view of the process (Walker, Sakai, & Brady, 2006). The survey found that out of ninety-nine participants, ninety-three found it to be very positive, while only one person stated that it was negative (Walker, Sakai, & Brady, 2006). One of the main reasons for its positive outlook was that inmates were able to find out their strengths and that they had a support system to help guide them (Walker, Sakai, & Brady, 2006). Another restorative justice approach within Hawaii can be seen in the Pono Kaulike program that hopes to solve criminal offenses through mediation.

Pono Kaulike is a Honolulu program for the goal of bringing together offenders, victims, and the community to solve issues without the use of prison (Walker & Hayashi, 2009). The program started in 2003 as a test program that used restorative conferencing. The program is described as a “solution-focused brief therapy” process (Walker & Hayashi, 2009). Pono Kaulike uses three types of conferences: restorative conferences, restorative dialogues, and restorative sessions. Each differs based on the amount of contact that is desired between the offender and victim. Each type of conference focuses

upon what needs to be done to help people heal and to rely less on blame and punishment. Through this process, the Pono Kaulike program hopes to decrease recidivism. A small evaluation of the program revealed positive results in the form of decreased recidivism, but the magnitude of the significance found was relatively small.

Restorative practices have evolved through the years to be applied in areas other than prison and court. In 2004, the Brazilian Ministry of Justice received a United Nations Development Program grant to create their first restorative justice pilot project (Wachtel, 2009). Dominic Barter became the creator of the program due to his efforts with local drug gang members in the 1990's (Wachtel, 2009). This background allowed for him to help develop the program around the local issue of drug gang members within Sao Paulo, Brazil.

The process was first designed to be compassionate, where blame and punishment were not a part of the practice. Brazil's program is crafted to bring together a variety of community members to help victims and offenders, but also to improve the surrounding area. One of the main goals was to bring together youth from different backgrounds. This meant that youth from poor communities would interact with those who came from more wealthy families, thus creating a relationship that was once absent in society (Wachtel, 2009). The addition of the police into the process helped to create the notion of restorative circles to solve youth offenses.

To avoid attaching a stigma to any person, the program avoids using the terms offender and victim, but replaces them with the "author of the act" and "recipient of the act" (Wachtel, 2009). This method helps keep restorative circles on an even basis so that discussion can be facilitated without one person feeling blamed. This combined effort

between the courts, social service agencies, and other criminal justice agencies hopes to decrease the amount of youth involved within the criminal justice system through such practices.

Free workshops are being offered to the public so that anyone can become trained in becoming a facilitator and hopefully this work will branch out from just this program and into the community (Wachtel, 2009). Schools within the area are beginning to use such circles and practices as well. The restorative practices used have shown a reduction in the referral rate for youths to the juvenile court by fifty percent since its creation (Wachtel, 2009). By concentrating on an issue that has had damaging affects to the area, people within the community can see the progress such efforts have made in combating drug gang members. Such visible results will help to empower more community members to participate.

The efforts within Sao Paulo, Brazil show how a program can expand rapidly if it is deemed successful. Within the city it has grown from a single program involving youth to one that involves the community and is currently being expanded into local schools. The city of Hull, England has taken the effort to a greater degree. The Hull Centre for Restorative Practices and the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) hope to make the city of Hull, England a “restorative city” (Lewis, 2009). To fully transform the city, the plan is to have every organization that works with children or youth use restorative practices (Lewis, 2009).

Currently such practices have been implemented in the police department and in a school pilot program (Lewis, 2009). The Hull police use the method of restorative conferences to bring in victims, offenders, and other supporters. This practice is put into

use before using any formal judicial process for any first time minor offense. The police have reported lower incidences per week citing decreases in verbal and physical abuse (Lewis, 2009). The school's approach has been to use circles to get children and their parents together to meet with staff members to discuss issues. The school has shown decreases in expulsion and punctuality in the school has improved eighty-seven percent (Lewis, 2009). School suspension has shown a drop from 178 days between 2006 and 2007 compared to 34.5 days between 2007 and 2008 (Lewis, 2009). The school has also shown a drop in incidences of physical abuse and it has also shown a decline on incidences of racism (Lewis, 2009). The successes within the city are replicated in other areas, but through different methods.

A program within Newham, England has brought youth together over a central issue and has made them the leaders of their own restorative practices. The Newham Restorative Justice Network is a program dedicated to combating the issues of guns, gangs, knives, and street crime ("Resolution 36", 2010). What makes this program unique is that it is run by a youth advisory panel. These youth range in age from sixteen to twenty-five and have all been affected in some way with the issues that the program hopes to combat ("Resolution 36", 2010). The group helps to advise others such as police, counselors, or support groups on restorative practices, but also to perform sessions themselves ("Resolution 36", 2010). The group has raised enough money to hold restorative sessions on Fridays and Sundays with youth between the ages of thirteen and nineteen ("Resolution 36", 2010).

The program brings in both offenders and victims to talk with their peers about certain issues. The panel has been extensively trained to facilitate such meetings, but can

also train others and hold workshops to do so. The efforts were nominated for an award from the Philip Lawrence Award Network (PLANET) in 2009 for being a youth run program in the United Kingdom that is making a positive impact on their communities (“PLANET”, 2010). Some of the criteria for the award include the promotion of citizenship, crime reduction and promoting respect and understanding (“PLANET”, 2010). The efforts put in place have helped youth become involved in an issue that greatly affects their lives.

A publication by Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has looked at a meta-analysis of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs which are dedicated to “promoting healthy development and academic achievement” in students (“CASEL”, 2008). The study reviewed more than seven-hundred other studies through 2007 surrounding schools, family, and community interventions that promoted social and emotional skills in youth from age five to eighteen (“CASEL”, 2008). The results of the study focused upon school-based research, thus narrowing down the analysis to two hundred and seven studies (“CASEL”, 2008). Overall, their research found that there was a nine percent decline in conduct problems within schools and an eleven percent improvement in test scores from such programs (“CASEL”, 2008).

The study also found that the programs had an effect upon student’s outlook upon school and themselves. There is a ten percent decrease in emotional distress, nine percent improvement in views of themselves, others, and school, and lastly a twenty-three percent improvement in social and emotional skills (“CASEL”, 2008). The programs focus is to design a learning environment that is safe and motivating that helps build

skills such as self-awareness, relationships skills, and decision making skills (“CASEL”, 2008). To do this, SEL outlines core ideals for teachers and administrators to take part in. These range from facilitating peer to peer discussions, to improving social support in the classroom. Implementing a program that relies upon social and emotional learning shows that students can thrive in such environments. Such methods as peer to peer interaction, restorative circles, or skill building can all help students develop relationships and succeed both in and out of school.

A study conducted by Karp and Breslin in 2001 examined three different schools and their use of restorative peace circles. Karp and Breslin state that “restorative practices are directed at changing student culture and strengthening social ties of youth to conventional people and institutions” (Karp & Breslin, 2001). This notion has been seen through indigenous practices, community conferences, and has become solidified with the use of peace circles. A program such as this would have to emphasize behavior and bonds rather than disciplinary issues. Peace circles revolve around this idea. The focus of the three programs studied is to bring in all stakeholders in an event and to allow them a voice in its resolution process.

Karp and Breslin believe that one must improve community capacity to provide an offender with opportunities to succeed (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Such opportunities include employment, community work, or further education (Karp & Breslin, 2001). They also believe that success is dictated by a program that provides “clear norms and behavior standards” (Karp & Breslin, 2001). One of the last items required for success is to develop “social control, stress management, problem solving, and communication skills (Karp & Breslin, 2001; Gottfredson, 1997). Numerous aspects of these beliefs are

currently present within peace circle programs and within the schools examined within this research.

The schools studied by Karp and Breslin created peace circle programs out of a concern over violence that was disrupting the educational process (Karp & Breslin, 2001). The first schools that were examined were in Minnesota. In 1995, the state provided money to communities to help reduce violence through prevention and peacemaking programs (Karp & Breslin, 2001). The program created brought the victims, offenders, supporters, and community members into a restorative conference within the school. The circles relied upon both teachers and administration to facilitate the meetings. This practice was implemented into the Seward Montessori Elementary School, Kaposia and Lincoln Center Elementary Schools, Princeton High School, and South St. Paul High School (Karp & Breslin, 2001). After such practices were put in place, each one of these Minnesota public schools showed decreases in one or more areas relating to violence.

The Seward Montessori Elementary School had a twenty-seven percent reduction in the number of suspensions and expulsions within a year (Karp & Breslin, 2001). The Lincoln Center Elementary School had their violent incidences cut by one half in 1997 and, after two years, they averaged only two incidences per day compared to seven in the years prior (Karp & Breslin, 2001). These results were similarly reflected within the Kaposia Elementary School. Each of the schools that were examined mandated that all violent acts must be reported (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Much like the elementary schools, both high schools saw a drop in suspensions. South St. Paul's saw a decrease from 110

out of school suspensions in the first year to sixty-five in the second (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Similar to Minnesota, was that of the Denver Colorado School Mediation Project.

The Denver Colorado School Mediation Project in 1997 implemented peace circles and community conferences within mostly elementary and middle schools to help curb issues of “drugs, vandalism, theft, assaults, and harassment” (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Peace circles were used as a way to discuss and address student conduct. These circles took place within classrooms and allowed for conversation to develop before it was needed to be taken to a community conference level. If a serious incident occurred, community conferences were used to supplement peace circles in solving the issue. These practices were not just used after an incident, but also after a student returned from out of school suspension or expulsion (Karp & Breslin, 2001). The school used this method to help reintegrate the student, focusing on the safety, health, and community, rather than the offense (Karp & Breslin, 2001). There are no statistics to examine within this study on Denver; however, it is an example of the range of such programs.

A study conducted by Stinchcomb , Bazemore, and Reinstenberg provides further insight into the research of Karp and Breslin mentioned previously. Within their research, they first examine the use of zero tolerance policies within schools, stating that they are often a quick fix and cost effect in the short term (Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Reinstenberg, 2006). They compare zero tolerance policies to determinate sentencing practices within the criminal justice system, that they create larger cost implications in the end (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Some of the specific negatives of such policies are “withdrawal of school staff, stigma among peers, disruption of the educational progress, and a loss of state aid based on average daily attendance” (Costenbador, & Markson,

1998; Stinchcomb et al., 2006). These have caused a major push for restorative practices usage within school districts. With the idea that such practices are more effective than zero tolerance, Stinchcomb et al. look at the schools that Karp and Breslin previously examined.

This 2006 study examined the three Minnesota public schools, including Lincoln Center Elementary, Kaposia Elementary, and South St. Paul Junior High School (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Much of the data in their research revolved around the Lincoln Center Elementary school previously studied by Karp and Breslin. Within South St. Paul Junior High School, they found that students were actively requesting peace circles and the decrease in out of school suspensions found both within this study and Karp and Breslin's were attributable to these circles (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). The reason why this occurred was that having the extra option of peace circles allowed for the school to keep many students that they ordinarily would have sent out of school (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). This same reason was attributed to Kaposia Elementary School's drop in suspensions. One of the issues that did arise however was that the program lacked enough support within this elementary school, thus in-school suspensions increased (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). The study also found that these students at the high school level tended to have more experience with circles and thus used them more frequently to resolve issues or conflicts (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). The findings within this research collaborate with Karp and Breslin and can be seen more clearly within Lincoln Center Elementary.

Karp and Breslin looked mainly at acts of violence overall within their 2001 study. Stinchcomb et al. examined these rates and found decreases in a range of areas.

Suspensions, as mentioned before, declined, but this 2006 study states that in 2000 the number decreased from one hundred and twenty-six instances to ninety-nine and in 2000 to 2001 it decreased to forty-two suspensions (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Out-of-school suspensions followed the same pattern, having occurred thirty times between 1998 to 1999 and decreasing to eleven uses in 2000 to 2001 (Stinchcomb et al., 2006).

Two of the most important findings included a decrease in behavioral referrals and an increase in attendance. Behavioral referrals reached 1,143 instances between 1998 and 1999, but decreased to four hundred and seven in 2000 to 2001 (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). Within this time period there was no change in the mandatory reporting policy, thus the numbers should not be skewed. Lastly, this study found that attendance increased from eighty-five percent between 1997 and 1998 to slightly above ninety-five percent between 2000 and 2001 (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). As stated previously, such practices in other schools like Kaposia ran into issues relating to support. The reason for Lincoln's higher degree of success is attributed to such positive support due to their teachers having six months prior experience before using such practices within the school, thus the program had an easier time starting out (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). One of the last reasons cited for its success was that of a restorative justice planner staff member solely responsible for helping conferences and peace circles function properly within the school. The school had a staff member that helped create alternative disciplinary measures in the beginning of the programs use (Stinchcomb et al., 2006). This staff member was later laid off due to a lack of funding, but their presence at the beginning may have helped get the program started to where it could be sustainable. Starting such a program with a foundation helped sustain the practice once the staff

member was let go. This starting ground proved beneficial towards the overall use of the program.

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, has implemented different restorative practices within many of the local schools. Four of the schools that the institute outlines vary in size, location, and age group, but each has shown a great deal of success with the implementation of restorative practices. West Philadelphia High School teaches grades nine to twelve. The school as of 2009 had 913 students and ninety-eight percent of which are African American (Lewis, 2009). The school has eighty-four percent of its students eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch (Lewis, 2009). The school has implemented restorative practices in the fall of 2008 and concentrated on using restorative circles within the classroom. After one year, these practices have shown a decline in overall assaults on teachers and students by around forty percent (Lewis, 2009). The program in its infancy has shown positives and many of these results have been seen in schools ranging in their type of neighborhood.

Another school within Pennsylvania to have restorative practices implemented within the curriculum is that of Pottstown High School. One of the major issues that this suburban school struggles with is that of transplant students. Many students come into the school from urban areas and the school has found difficulty in helping these students become fully integrated with school practices and rules in a quick manner. The school was placed on academic probation and remained there until it decided to use restorative practices. In 2006, the school had ten teachers trained in restorative practices and now requires the entire staff to be trained and use restorative practices within the classroom in

some sort of manner (Lewis, 2009). The school has since been removed from academic probation. This school compares well with West Philadelphia in both grades taught and comparable number of students. Each school has their own issues, but one of the main differences is that of their location, one urban and another suburban. The results of this school showed decreases in fights, cafeteria violations, and detention each year from 2005 to 2007 (Lewis, 2009). Detentions dropped dramatically from one hundred and sixty-eight in 2005 to thirty-seven in 2007 (Lewis, 2009). Not only has such a program found positive results ranging in a suburban to urban setting, but it has also shown results in younger students.

The Newton Middle School teaches grades seven through eighth, catering to eight hundred and sixty-one students (Lewis, 2009). This school may teach lower grades, but it teaches nearly as many students as the high schools previously presented. Restorative practices became used within the school in 2006 after the staff was trained. Since then the school states that their discipline problems are disappearing. The school has been able to decline its need for detention days per week as there have also been decreases in incidences of fighting, threats, and theft (Lewis, 2009). The results of this school continue to support the notion of restorative practices having an impact upon school incidences.

The IIRP began their pilot program for SaferSanerSchools in 1998 within the Palisades High School in Pennsylvania. This school teaches ninth grade through twelve like the other high schools and has around seven hundred and fifty students (Lewis, 2009). The program used an approach called “check-in” and “check-out” circles that

would be done at the start and finish of every class (Lewis, 2009). These circles would talk about issues, goals, and expectations that the students had (Lewis, 2009).

The results from this school can be seen over a greater period of time than the prior studied schools as they were relatively new. Between the years of 1998 and 1999 to 2001 and 2002, the school saw a decrease in referrals, detentions, suspensions, and disruptive behavior (Lewis, 2009). The first pilot program has shown great success since the beginning of its use of restorative circles. These results have helped create new programs, a school board in Canada that is implementing restorative practices within their elementary schools and even within a school for boys in England.

Restorative practices have emerged throughout the world in a variety of areas within society. Programs dedicated to creating understanding rather than blame are steadily becoming widely used within schools and are showing success. A program that emphasizes much of the efforts and goals of the prior research is that of the Monroe High School in Rochester, NY. Monroe has implemented a program through Partnerships in Restorative Initiatives to help students talk out issues through circles. This restorative practice hopes to achieve the success that has already been seen in schools much like Monroe.

The literature on peace circles provides insight into the effectiveness of the practice, how it should be implemented to be successful, and what information can be used for future implementations of this practice. The previous literature discussed points to peace circles being an effective alternative towards curbing delinquency. By examining past studies in varying countries, it speaks to the range of areas this program can be applied. Seeing positive results in such diverse environments has shown that if

peace circles are implemented properly, positive results can be seen in almost any area. This is important to note because prior literature in schools that fit the same profile as Monroe High School have shown success and it is therefore easier to dictate whether Monroe High School is seeing the same results or not through this current study.

In examining the literature on this subject it is apparent that there are problems with implementing peace circles. One issue that develops is the problem with funding. From the study by Stinchcomb et al. 2006, it was stated that the school program succeeded due to the strong foundation built by a staff member dedicated towards helping peace circles function (Stinchcomb et al, 2006). Due to budgetary cuts, this staff member was let go. Money is a problem that can end a program quickly. It can be seen that without funding peace circles could either be cut from a budget or not given enough money to be successful.

One of the most important aspects of previous literature that is carried into this study is the description of the practice. In knowing how a school implemented peace circles and the procedure they use, this information can be compared to Monroe High School. If a specific school sees success through their program, it may have something to do with the procedure used in peace circles. Knowing this it is easy to compare procedures and what one school is doing differently from another. An example of this would be a school conducting circles every day, compared to another school once a week. If results vastly differ between these two schools then it can be inferred that the procedure created by the school is affecting the outcome. The literature presented previously allows for general comparisons to Monroe High School and provides this study with the ability to see where its procedure may be exemplary or lacking.

Theoretical Foundations

The use of theory within research is critical in guiding methodology, but also in attaining interpretable results. Theory provides a basis or starting point that must be present within any scientific research. There are numerous theories that may provide insight into a study; however, one must filter out those that become difficult to apply or replicate. Many theories are broad in nature and thus may not fit directly into ones' research. Concepts from such broad theories may be used to help enhance a study, but often it is difficult for every part of a theory to fit perfectly into a research area. The study of peace circles within Monroe High School is no exception to the rule. This topic can be applied to many different theories, but only a few are ideal. Below are the in depth details on what theories are being applied to the study of peace circles in Monroe High School and how these have helped shape my methods and expectations.

The idea behind labeling theory is that deviance is a creation of society, thus those groups who hold the most power can label an action as deviant (Becker, 1963). In examining this theory on a societal level, such actions could include drug addicts being labeled as "dope fiends" or something not illegal such as a homosexual being labeled as a "fairy" (Becker, 1963, p. 44). The theory postulates that such a label can change a person's identity and thus make them more likely to continue deviant acts. These acts do not necessarily have to be criminal or wrong; however, if they are seen as not abiding by social norms by the majority then the individual may become labeled as deviant.

Howard Becker states that we all have a master and auxiliary status. He provides an illustration of each, for example that a master status may be your profession or race and an auxiliary status may be your social status (Becker, 1963). The notion becomes

that if a person is labeled as deviant, one or both of their status' are altered. To use the school as an example, a child may have his/her master status changed from student to trouble maker if a label is placed upon the child. This label can cause a person to begin associating with that label psychologically. Malcolm Klein states that the label becomes a "self-fulfilling prophecy" that propels one down the deviant course that they have been placed upon (Klein, 1986). To use the example mentioned previously, a student's master or auxiliary status could be changed to that of a trouble maker, thus their ideals can drastically change due to a label. One of the reasons for this becomes that once labeled, others within society will treat that person differently. In a societal level, Becker states that police and the community will associate you with that label and thus treat you that way (Becker, 1963). Adding to this, the person becomes "undesirable" and cannot escape from the label (Becker, 1963, p. 44). This theory not only applies within society, but fits within a school environment.

Schools do not suffer from a large degree of criminal activity; however, there are still social norms that many students abide by and not following such norms could cause one to still be labeled as deviant. A student may be seen as deviant by his or her peers based solely on being different compared to the majority of students. Schools are known for creating an environment that helps develop different social groups. These social groups are often diverse in personality traits and interests. Such differences can help further the labeling process. If a student sees a peer as being different they may label them as deviant because they do not follow the social norms. Even though the student has not done anything wrong they may find themselves being treated differently by the school community.

Such labeling may not just apply to one individual, but a whole group of students. Such a label can alter their master status from student to something that is frowned upon by their peers. If this label is internalized by the student or students, grades may decline due the “self-fulfilling prophecy” and the school environment may become increasingly hostile. As dictated by Becker, those within the community will treat the deviant person differently, thus it can be inferred that students, teachers, and even administration could fall into this as well. Using this theory shows why many students struggle within school and within peer relationships. A label being placed upon them for no wrong doing can cause them to feel unsafe and decrease confidence, which in turn can harm their school work. With this notion, peace circles should provide greater communication and understanding within the school, thus hopefully decrease the labeling process.

The second theory that will help guide research on the use of peace circles in my study is that of strain theory. Many of Strain theories ideals coincide with labeling theory. Strain theory is the main theory in this research. One of the creators of strain theory was Robert Merton. He believed that deviance or criminality is explained by strains caused by a person’s opportunities being blocked (Agnew, 2001, 2006). Robert Merton describes that people adapt to such blockages through four methods, “conformity, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion” (Agnew, 2006, p. 76).

Conforming is the act of seeing how society functions and working to be a part of it. The method of ritualism is described by Merton as the “means becoming the aspirations of the individual,” rather than having an end goal (Williams & McShane, 2009, p. 81). The act of retreatism is when the individual “drops out of society” due to their rejection of both goals and means (Williams & McShane, 2009, p. 81). Merton

describes retreatists by providing the example of those who are consumed by a drug (Williams & McShane, 2009). Lastly, rebellion is seen within strain theory as modifying societal goals and means, but not an outright rejection of them (Williams & McShane, 2009). Each one of these adaptations is a method in getting around a person's needs not being met. Many of these adaptations however can lead to criminality or deviant behavior.

The main reason why strain theory was chosen along with labeling theory to further my research was their connection to each other. These two are often associated with each other. The reason for this is that labeling can cause strain. This means that a person who is labeled by an individual or society will feel pressure from it. This pressure will cause the person to become strained and possibly resort to deviant behavior. Often labels cannot be discussed without mentioning the strain that comes with them. An example of this would be an ex-prisoner returning to society. This individual is seen by society as a criminal and they cannot attain specific jobs due to their criminal past. This blockage of goals causes strain and develops from the label of being a criminal. In regards to a school, a student who performs a delinquent or violent act could be labeled similar to the former prisoner was. After such delinquent behavior, the student could be treated negatively by teachers and students in a manner that harms their ability to succeed in school. The label of being delinquent creates the strain from being treated as a deviant. For many instances labeling creates strain and the ensuing actions of the person.

Responses to strains can range for a few different reasons. There are a few types of strains that can cause different outcomes or methods of adapting. The first type, or the objective strain, is where something would be generally disliked by a group. An example

given by Agnew is that of failing grades, to where most students would be displeased (Agnew, 2006). Agnew's strain theory was a slight modification on Merton's ideas. Agnew based his theory more on the notion that if people were treated poorly then they would have a negative reaction to it while Merton's was more based on goal attainment (Agnew, 2006; Williams & McShane, 2009). On a more individual level is the subjective strain, where an act is disliked by the individual, usually specific to that person.

Another type includes vicarious strains. A vicarious strain occurs when people of importance around an individual are feeling a type of strain and it causes the individual to feel pressure because those they care for are being harmed. The last type of strain described by Agnew is that of anticipatory strain. To receive such a strain, a person must believe that a condition will remain present over time, thus they take preventative measures to keep it from happening (Agnew, 2006). Each type can cause a person to respond differently, whether through legal or illegal means. This theory also brings in the notion that severity will affect the type of reaction.

The severity of a strain can range from the magnitude of harm done to the length of time the strain is felt. Robert Agnew describes four of the most likely reasons for crime to be used as a response to strain. The first example is a strain that is high in magnitude. A few strains that would fit within this category would be losing a large sum of money, an often occurring strain, or something that "threatens a person's core needs or values" (Agnew, 2006, p. 80). This theory also sees that a strain that is felt as unjust will have a higher likelihood of being responded to with criminality. Agnew clarifies this by stating that a person is unlikely to respond harshly to being tripped by accident, but if

they are shoved they are more likely to view it as an unjust act, thus respond with negative behavior (Agnew, 2001, 2006).

Low self-control is the third likely cause of crime within this theory. One of the reasons for this is seen as an individual having a limited bond with institutions such as school or their job (Agnew, 2006). Such self control has also been linked to having a poor parental relationship (Agnew, 2006). Strains that are seen as more easily solved through illegal means become another problem. When criminal efforts are seen as having a higher benefit than that of legal means, the response will most likely be the one that relieves the strain, but also provides the best outcome. Each level of severity within strains can be seen within communities, but also within schools.

Schools touch many aspects of strain theory whether its student's methods of adapting, the type of strain, or to its severity. Looking at the adaptation to strain, each method seen within society also applies to students within school. Students can be seen as conforming if they do not necessarily agree with policies, but abide by them because they know the importance of graduation. An example of this would be the use of school uniforms for the seventh and eighth graders within Monroe High School. These students may not want to wear a specific article of clothing, but conform because it is a means to an end. Other students may show ritualism in that instead of having the goal of graduation, their goal may be to just attend class. If the student is present in school then that student has met their aspirations. Retreatism can be seen within Monroe High School through their dropout rate described later in the personal interview section of this study. There is a major problem with truancy within the school and many students

choose to reject the means and goals of the majority and skip or drop out of school entirely.

Lastly an issue in almost every school is that of rebellion. Students show this by disagreeing or acting out against specific policies, but they also understand why they are present. One example of this relates back to a personal observation on school uniforms. The uniform includes a mandated blue sweatshirt which can include a hood attached to it. A student who rebelled wore what is required, but went against policy and wore their sweatshirt hood over their head. This occurrence was deemed acceptable due to it not being an outright disruption or glaring rejection of school policy. Seeing these acts infer that strain is present within students at Monroe High School and in most if not all schools. A variety of pressures face students, but since strain is a psychological state it is difficult to measure. The way to measure strain is to examine such actions as described above and see how often they occur. Another method to evaluate amounts of strain is to specifically ask students about issues that cause them strain. This same conclusion can be drawn about the types of strains.

The four types of strains mentioned earlier are also present within schools. Previously discussed, the objective strain can be seen in failing grades. Failing grades are present within every school and academic achievement is a major pressure for most students. Failure to attain success or such goals as passing grades can affect numerous aspects of a student's life, thus could result in deviant behavior. This same idea applies to subjective strains to where each individual student has their own personal goals that may not be achieved. Such personal goals can be developed by the individual themselves, their family's expectations, or school expectations. Students may feel the

impact of vicarious strain if their friends feel such pressure or if their family is having difficulty. Numerous issues within schools develop from student relationships outside within the community. These issues often carry with the student and effect their academics or relationships within the school. Lastly, anticipatory strain can be seen in a few different areas. If a student is being bullied within school they may avoid specific areas or people to stay away from the strain. This can also be seen within students who have failing grades and choose to skip school. These students know that the grades follow them in school so they avoid the strain by avoiding school altogether. These types of strain will depend on the severity of the act and are important to the study of peace circles as peace circles attempt to reduce strain through discussion.

The presence of low social control is a main reason for the presence of peace circles within Monroe High School. For many years the school has struggled with a lack of bonds between students, teachers, and the institution. The school also handles a great deal of students that have a wide variety of issues that they deal with outside of this environment on a daily basis, including negative parental relationships. One of the school's goals is to address each of these through implementing peace circles and hopefully make the school a safer place through improving its bond with students. Lastly, the incentive for students to engage in deviant behavior to solve a strain is also being addressed. Students have been known to cheat to achieve academic success as it's easier than studying. Hoping to address this as well, peace circles aim to discuss with students about these issues and how they can solve these problems as a group.

Strain theory applies in almost every aspect to the school environment. Peace circles within Monroe High School have been implemented for many of the issues strain

theory presents. Some of the main reasons for the creation of strain are currently present at Monroe High School. Brezina and colleagues, state that strain is often due to “high rates of residential mobility, family disruption, economic deprivation, and weak commitment of community institutions” (Brezina, Piquero, & Mazerolle, 2001).

A major problem within the school is that of transience. The school sees numerous students leave their school midyear, but also a large number of new students. This constant change does not allow for students to easily adapt to a new environment and hinders teachers. The community that Monroe High School is in is also economically deprived, where eighty-five percent of students are on free or reduced lunch (“James Monroe High School,” 2011). Adding to this list of causes of strains, Agnew also includes abusive peer relationships, including insults or physical assaults, and a negative secondary school experience, such as grades or relationships with teachers (Agnew, 2006).

Grades have already been mentioned, but within the school there have been numerous instances of fights or disciplinary measures due to insults. A hostile environment or one that creates a negative emotion within a student will only worsen a strain. The theory dictates that if these strains are addressed and that goals are not being blocked then deviant behavior should decrease. For this reason, peace circles are being used to discuss such issues in a group setting to help student cope, but also to find solutions to problems before the student falls into a specific label or deviancy.

Theoretical Application

Both labeling theory and strain theory can be applied to the Monroe High School and their work with peace circles. Labeling theory proposes that deviance is created through another person or group's label (Becker, 1963). This will create a stigma upon the person and can possibly cause that individual to permanently believe that they will always be within that label. For this reason, a person will attempt to avoid such a stigma through deviant means or by committing deviant acts because they feel there is no way to avoid it. A method to keep such labels from being placed is to improve understanding within a community or in this case a school. By making people more tolerant and understanding of differences, such a stigma may not be used. Testing labeling theory would be difficult to specifically find out whether a label is causing delinquency in school. However, in a broad sense the theory can be tested based on whether the methods ordinarily used to avoid stigma from labels decrease the delinquency in school. For this reason all of labeling theory would be used, but in a general sense. Rather than specifically testing whether a student's master or auxiliary status has been changed due to a stigma, it is easier and more practical within this study to look at whether such acts normally associated with deviant labels are being decreased. Such acts for example would include numbers of fights, detentions, suspensions or simply the number of times reported to the administration. Since this study is completely qualitative in nature, the theory will be used to see if those working within the environment see a difference in the number of instances and whether it can be related to the use of peace circles. The theory would predict that decreasing labeling would cause drops within delinquent behavior such as fights and such decreases would improve both the environment and

communication. Since labeling would be decreased, many more students would feel part of the large student body and would therefore not need to resort to delinquent behavior. Going further, with lower delinquency rates and a positive environment, grades would improve as more time could be concentrated on school than safety issues. Lastly, the school could see a rise in attendance due to this improved environment.

Strain theory implies that everyday life causes strain. This means that such social aspects of life such as ones occupation, personal relationships, or school affects ones levels of strain. As Agnew mentioned, the deviance will develop through ones inability to decrease such pressures placed upon them (Agnew, 2006). For this reason, the theory dictates that a person will turn to deviance to relieve the strain or pressure. The theory works well within the confines of a school, but becomes difficult to fully address when some strains are caused by outside sources. Without conducting a massive research project, it is difficult to measure students' relationships with their families and their attitudes in regards to school, their peers, and personal aspirations. Without knowledge of these, one must choose to examine only pieces of the theory to test as it would take an immense undertaking to fully examine the whole theory's impact in regards to peace circles. One of the methods to avoid strain as dictated by Agnew are to "improve coping skills and resources, increase social support, and to increase social control" (Agnew, 2006, p. 85). For this reason much of the focus in my study will be concentrated on how well peace circles improve these aspects. These aspects will be measured through my hypotheses provided in the following section. Change within these areas will show that the intervention on strain is working if my hypotheses are deemed correct. Due to the difficulty of interviewing students, it is difficult to quantify the true impact of the peace

circles effort in improving such areas however. It is difficult to assess this population for multiple reasons. The school is extremely diverse and would demand an extensive study to be truly representative, which would demand a great deal of time. Again, instances of deviance such as fights, referrals and truancy will be examined. Questions will be asked of those interviewed on these levels and how peace circles have affected them, if at all. Looking at these should give some idea on how social control and social support have been impacted. To examine coping skills, questions must be asked on how students have been seen in dealing with issues they are presented with and if it is different from years prior. Due to the broad nature of this theory and using qualitative methods, the examination of factors outside of the school such as family support, economic deprivation, or any other sort of community strain will not be examined.

Guided Research

This study was conducted through strictly qualitative means, the questions and hypothesis used for each theory often overlapped since each is similar in nature. In defining my hypothesis I must look at what would dictate testing each theory. Under labeling theory decreasing the likelihood of a stigma being placed would be seen through a decrease in persistent deviance. More specifically, one would expect that most first time offenders would not offend again or at least offend less with the current use of peace circles compared to the years before peace circles were available to solve school issues. Peace circles should help decrease the likelihood of a stigma being placed upon a student, thus if it is not placed that student would not need to avoid the strain through further deviance. Such delinquency could be seen as fights, insults, cheating, or disregard for

school rules in general. As for strain theory I would also look towards the amount of delinquency seen in Monroe High School, but also looking at opinions on whether the environment and level of communication has changed. Delinquency in this case would pertain to the number of instances of fights, referrals to administration, detentions, or suspensions. The reason for this is that if there is a decrease in strain then the environment should feel and look safer. Also a reason to look at the communication is to see if students are using positive ways in dealing with strain. For these reasons my hypotheses are as follows.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived delinquency.

H₁: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease overall perceptions of delinquency.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived school fights.

H₂: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease perceptions of school fights.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived detention rates.

H₃: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease perceptions of detention rates.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived suspension rates.

H₄: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease perceptions of suspension rates.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived student referrals to the administration.

H₅: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease perceptions of student referrals to the administration.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no perceived impact upon those involved with the program.

H₆: Peace circles within Monroe High School have had a perceived positive impact in those involved with the program.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived student communication.

H₇: Peace circles within Monroe High School have increased the perception of student communication.

The study will provide insight into each hypothesis, but without a more in depth qualitative study or without quantitative data the results will only provide a general idea of the impact of peace circles rather than a more conclusive finding. The hypotheses will provide knowledge into the perceptions from those involved within the program.

From observation of the program and the review of literature, I expect that peace circles will decrease delinquency. I expect to see decreases in all areas including suspensions, detentions, and fights. I did not include arguments or disruptions in my hypothesis as they are hard to quantify where as detentions and suspensions are fairly conclusive. In a more general sense I expect that student grades will have improved in the years since the implementation of peace circles. Based on the theories presented, if labeling and strain occurred to a lesser degree, the environment would be improved. With an improved environment comes a friendlier place for student learning to take place, thus grades would likely improve. I would also expect that due to increased and improved communication, teachers would understand the numerous issues that face their students and would be more affective at helping them learn. Pertaining to the program I also expect to see a positive attitude towards the program from those interviewed since I believe it would greatly enhance the school. The one area that I do not fully know what to expect is the administrative referrals. With decreases in detention and suspension I stated to expect decreases in such referrals as well.

Research Design

Evaluation of restorative justice programs becomes problematic due to the variables that could affect the results. Having multiple programs working together, such as community conferencing and peace circles, makes it difficult to discern whether the outcome is linked to a specific method or results are from using the combination of the two. For this reason, many programs are difficult to evaluate because they are not the sole program affecting the outcome. Within Monroe High School in Rochester, NY, students rely upon both peace circles and community conferences. Relying on both allows for each program to concentrate on its purpose; however, evaluating one program without looking at the other is difficult. For this reason, I used many of the same approaches towards evaluation as past research and modeled questions similar to a survey conducted within Monroe High School.

The original study that I was conducting was centered on ten open-ended interviews with teachers and administrators within Monroe High School (MHS) and members of Partners in Restorative Initiatives from November 2010 to January 2011. These individuals would be asked fourteen questions that would allow for them to go in depth with their responses. The questions as I will share later ranged in asking for an overview of the program, personal opinions on the positives and negatives of peace circles within MHS, and lastly what the program should pursue in the future. Once collected, these answers would supplement the observational data acquired from participating within the Peer Ambassador Training program and the ensuing peace circles within the training process. The Peer Ambassador Training program is an all day instruction to help students within MHS become co-facilitators within peace circles with

their teacher. The all day training provides insight into the purpose of peace circles, how to handle specific topics of discussion, and the importance of becoming an ambassador for their peace circle.

Partners in Restorative Initiatives train selective students and teachers in the proper use of peace circles within this instruction. Once the process is complete, students who go through the program can help lead classroom peace circles and also act as a representative for student concerns outside of the classroom. The last source of data would be taken from the Monroe Restorative Survey from 2009 that was given to three hundred and fifty-eight students, ranging in each grade level and asked questions about levels of respect, safety, and peace circles. This survey was the first evaluation of peace circles and the school environment by MHS. The questions were designed to provide insight into student and teacher perceptions. This survey was the beginning steps towards evaluating the affect of peace circles within MHS. Currently this is the only evaluation of peace circles within MHS, but the school plans to use this survey at least once a year to continually receive student and teacher feedback. These three sources would develop into the current thesis. This was the original plan for the thesis; however, the research design has been modified due to reasons outside of my control.

Current Study

The current study relies upon survey analysis, personal observation, and interviews with individuals who have been involved with the peace circle program in Monroe High School. The Monroe Restorative Survey from 2009 is discussed in depth and results are analyzed. The personal observation portion of this study examines the

Peer Ambassador Program that teaches students how to facilitate peace circles, which is discussed in a later portion of this study. Lastly, the interviews had to be decreased from ten to four. The four individuals who were interviewed fall into one of three categories, PiRI member, teacher, and administrator at Monroe High School. The number of those interviewed in each will remain strictly confidential and all results will be reported in an anonymous fashion. The method used to report these findings will keep any individual safe from undesirable outcomes due to opinions or statements that could be seen as undesirable.

The methods of this study were put through the Human Subjects Research Department to be cleared by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The research conducted was approved and later ruled exempt. The notice for exemption is shown under Appendix 2.

Survey Analysis

The Monroe Restorative Survey (MRS) was given to students in 2009 to evaluate their opinions on the school environment (MRS, 2009). The survey consisted of sixteen close-ended questions and two open-ended questions that were created and distributed by the administration at MHS. Distributed to three hundred and fifty-eight students, results were recorded based on the sex of the student and the grade level (MRS, 2009). All three hundred and fifty-eight students took the survey; however, they did not answer every question. Responses range from a ninety-nine percent response rate to ninety-five percent. All grades within MHS were included, ranging from seventh to twelfth grade. The close-ended questions ranged from asking about respect amongst students, safety

levels, the clarity of rules, and whether peace circles help to make Monroe a better school (MRS, 2009). The two open-ended questions were brief and asked what students liked about Monroe High School and secondly what they would like to change about Monroe. The results from the survey varied greatly by grade level.

A question on the survey asked if “students at Monroe show respect for one another” (MRS, 2009). This question was answered by each grade and was the most consistent with the results. As with every question asked, the survey recorded the results in a Likert scale, providing the options to strongly agree, agree, be neutral, disagree, or to strongly disagree with each statement. The charts have split the results into three categories, combining strongly agree and agree responses together and combining strongly disagree and disagree responses together. The majority answered question two by stating they felt it was neutral. Examining the results together, sixteen percent agreed that students showed respect to one another, thirty-eight percent were neutral, and forty-six percent disagreed (MRS, 2009).

An interesting result from this question is that many of those who agreed were in lower grade levels. The majority of positive responses to this question were seen amongst seventh and eighth grade students. The eleventh and twelfth grade students had the lowest positive responses, while the ninth grade students were the most likely to disagree with the statement. The results of from this question are shown in Table 1 within the Table section of this paper. This question showed a major problem within MHS. One of the main focuses to peace circles is treating each other with respect and such results are not a positive outlook on respect levels within the school. There is no

prior study conducted before peace circles or a more recent one by the school, so one cannot tell if this is an average response or whether it is actually an improvement.

The third inquiry asks a similar question to the second, but asked if students respect the teachers and staff at the school. Results found that fifteen percent agreed that students respected the staff while thirty-five percent were neutral, and around fifty percent disagreed (MRS, 2009). These findings are almost identical to the ones found in question two. This question however did not show the trend of lower grade levels showing the greater percentage of positive opinions than the higher grade levels. The results of this question are shown on Table 2 within the Table section of this paper. Each grade had its highest percentage disagreeing with the statement. Table one and two show the most negative responses to questions within the survey.

Positive results from the Monroe survey were evident as forty-nine percent of students agreed that they felt physically safe at MHS, around eighty percent agreed that the rules at MHS were clear, and around fifty percent of students agreed that they talk about their actions and listen to how it had affected others (MRS, 2009). These categories show that the efforts of peace circles are being at least understood and felt amongst students. Peace circles emphasize listening to other students and once trust is built within the circle discussions surrounding offenses or delinquent actions are conducted. The results of these questions within the survey appear to reflect the regular process of peace circles.

The last question that is important for this study is the final one asked of students. The close-ended questions concluded with asking students if “Peace Circles are helping to make Monroe a better school” (MRS, 2009). The results showed that thirty-eight

percent agreed with the statement, thirty-two percent were neutral, twenty-nine percent disagreed, when examining the results without the three percent who did not respond (MRS, 2009). The results of this survey varied in each grade level and to show the distinction the data has been placed into a chart shown within the Table section. The overall findings are shown in Table 3, and Table 4 depicts the results based on grade level.

The results, much like the question seen on table 1 of the survey, showed that students in lower grade levels saw peace circles as being positive at making Monroe a better school. There are a few reasons for such a result, the first being that it's possible that younger students respond better to the methods used at MHS. Another reason for the difference in lower grade levels compared to higher grade levels could be that the older students do not like the change compared to years without peace circles. This could be interpreted that the program may be catering more towards younger students and may not work or be as well liked amongst the older students. Another reason could be that these older students view the program as being forced upon them midway through high school. Another reason could be that peace circles are used more often in lower grades due to lower state requirements for the younger students. Such state requirements as New York State Regents exams could decrease the amount of time teachers in higher grade levels can devote to peace circles within the classroom. Such notions cannot be fully examined without a prior study or at least a follow up study.

The open-ended questions revealed a large variety of answers pertaining to things that students like about MHS. Numerous students stated friends, teachers, and school classes as being the best part of school; however, a few topics were also mentioned that

are important responses. The data provided does not state how often such answers were given or how many responses were received for this portion of the survey, but are reported only if the response was brought up within a specific grade level. This means that the amount of students who stated that a “good social environment” was a thing they liked about MHS is unknown; however, the results show which grade levels stated the same responses.

One of the most common answers through nearly every grade level was that of the environment. The answers ranged from being a good social environment, the caring attitude of teachers, to the feeling of safety. The use of peace circles was mentioned a few times within this section. The majority of responses mentioning peace circles were found in the lower grade levels of eighth and ninth graders; however it was also mentioned amongst the eleventh graders. Many stated that the teachers often listened and helped them through any problems they had. When asked what students would like to change about MHS, the results were relatively consistent.

The most reoccurring response when asked what students would like to see change was that of bullying (MRS, 2009). Every grade level stated that this was a problem, whether it was violence, teasing, disrespect, or fighting. Each grade often listed racism and language as well. The general consensus appears to be one of wanting improved understanding and respect. The responses included a select few who stated to get rid of peace circles; however, more were constructive in stating that they desired better topics for peace circles. Another student stated that they would like more opportunities for students to be heard. In addition to student responses, the whole teacher and administration staff was asked three different open-ended questions.

The first question asked of the teachers and administration within this survey was the same one asked of the students, to state what they liked best about MHS (MRS, 2009). Some of the answers to this question included the positive environment, communication and peace circles. The most common answers were that of having supportive staff, the school becoming a positive place in the past few years, and also having a sense of community (MRS, 2009). The diversity in answers is greater within this portion than seen amongst students; however, they all generally concentrate on the environment and improved communication.

The second question asked staff members what they were most concerned about within the school (MRS, 2009). The answers that followed were even more varied than the previous question. A common answer was the difficulty in maintaining restorative practices while having contradictory practices within the school. This response could point to a failure to implement peace circles into Monroe High School properly. Some staff members cited that administrators' punished students differently; therefore some of the work done in peace circles would be undermined (MRS, 2009). Another concern dealt with other staff members who were not supportive of the program. The focus of the answers lay on a need for a team approach amongst teachers and administrators and to have clear ways of handling delinquency and to be consistent with it as to keep from undermining peace circles. These answers were reflected within the final question of the Monroe survey.

The MHS survey concluded with the question asking teachers what they saw as valuable and what should be continue. The majority of responses included continuing peace circles, restorative practices, and after school activities (MRS, 2009). A large

number stated that these were the most essential activities to maintain. These answers were followed by the value of communication and having student support systems. Staff results appear to be concentrated into restorative practices and communication, but share many of the same ideas as the student results examined earlier.

The MHS Survey showed the positives within the school, but also the areas that need attention. The results differed, but still had some areas where the staff and students agreed. The peace circle program and restorative practices appear to be a desired program especially amongst staff and lower grade levels of students. The students expressed concerns over bullying and fighting, while the staff was concerned for inconsistent punishment undermining peace circles. These concerns coincide in that a solution to the problem may be through solving such instances more through restorative practices than other punitive methods. This would decrease the likelihood of inconsistent punishment and hopefully decrease fighting through better communication and understanding. The survey provides insight into the opinions of students in a variety of areas, all based on grade levels, but needs a follow up study to see if peace circles have the impact that was desired upon implementation. The open-ended questions are desirable in such a study as they provide a clearer picture of what is occurring within the school and can be examined next to the statistical data to draw conclusions. Future efforts in this area need to be more concise in how the data is reported. Each student's response must be recorded individually so statistical analysis can be conducted. This same idea needs to be applied within any open-ended questioning of a sample this large. Even though the results show some positive results, the degree of satisfaction could be better understood if responses were recorded in a different manner.

Personal Observation

Peace circles are often focus on general issues that affect all participants rather than specific focus on one or more students. This allows for topics such as deviancy, bullying, and respect to be discussed openly without any person being blamed specifically. One of the approaches that Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PiRI) has developed is that of the Monroe Peer Ambassador Program. The Peer Ambassador Program is designed to train students at Monroe High School on how to co-facilitate a circle with a staff member. This means that once trained, the student will help lead discussions, choose topics for circles, and to help represent student concerns to staff members. Such a program has been designed to provide students with the opportunity to take a greater responsibility in changing their school through peace circles.

The Monroe High School and PiRI were gracious enough to allow me to observe and participate within peace circles at the school. I was able to examine the full day of training, peace circle procedure, and to hear opinions of students based on questions asked of them from PiRI staff. The observations provided insight into how these students are trained, what responsibilities they have upon completion and most importantly their opinions of how peace circles have affected their school.

The Monroe Peer Ambassador Training was an all day training process that ran from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon. The program trains around eight students every few months. The training that I observed only had five students present as the others were not present for the school day or arrived too late in the afternoon to participate. Participants also included two teachers who desired to gain further

knowledge and skills in the peace circle process and an administrator who is being taught by PiRI to be a trainer.

The process began with an activity to get everyone within the peace circle involved. The activity served as an ice breaker, but also a way to introduce the overall purpose and history of peace circles. The practices used by indigenous peoples were cited as a guide. Peace circles were stated as being used to develop communication, respect, and a better environment.

The afternoon portion of the Peer Ambassador Training began with a discussion on whether peace circles had impacted the school. One of the student responses included stating that prior to peace circles, lockdowns within the school over fights or violence were a constant occurrence. This student then stated peace circles have decreased these occurrences and the school is less chaotic. Some of the students stated that they continue to enjoy the circles as the years progress because they know their peace circle well and know how to communicate with the individuals better once outside the group. One student cited that an issue was brought up in a peace circle and outside of school the students got together to discuss the issue openly and came to an agreeable conclusion. This student continued and stated that such a conclusion would never have occurred before the use of peace circles. Another response provided by students was that they thought it should be used sooner in lower grade levels such as in elementary schools so that they would be used to it by high school. The teachers present stated that communication improved between teachers and students. These staff members also mentioned that communication between each teacher was nonexistent before peace circles. One teacher stated that it was rare to hear teachers being openly friendly with

each other in the hallways in years past. A common theme to the answers also brought up the point that students were less afraid to talk about serious issues with teachers.

Teachers found it easier to teach since they knew their students better.

The training continued with each person creating a talking piece and to have a chance to use it within a practice circle. Afterward the rest of the training consisted of practicing ice breaker activities, discussing fun and serious topics, and concluding peace circles. Students and teachers had a chance to facilitate a circle and were given feedback to help them in future circles.

Upon completion of the training everyone discussed their feelings about the process and what they took away from it. Everyone was positive about the training, many stating that they understood the purpose of peace circles better and had a better outlook afterward. One of the students who had been negative towards the program after being recommended by a teacher to the ambassador program stated that they actually enjoyed the process and thought they could now facilitate a meeting. Throughout the process many of the students were shy and did not participate in every activity; however, by the end of the training every student was participating and had opened up. It was apparent that the circle helped make an awkward situation with new people much more comfortable for younger students. Also important to the process was the participation of the older students as they appeared to be an example to the younger members.

The overall feeling from the Peer Ambassador Training was a positive one. The students described not understanding the purpose of peace circles at the beginning of the process and by the end they all believed they served a significant purpose. One student went as far as stating they are pointless and are a waste of time in the beginning of the

training. This student later had a change of heart and saw peace circles as useful and that they could be fun. Teachers found that they had a greater amount of confidence in themselves to conduct circles and would know how to deal with unruly students better through this method. The training appeared to change everyone's opinions from either being uncertain of how to conduct circles or from being negative about them to being a positive.

The Peer Ambassador Program has become a sought after position within the student body. Numerous students have asked school staff for recommendations and view the position as being highly desirable. Ambassadors not only facilitate meetings with staff, but listen to any concerns that students bring to them. After school, one day a week, the student ambassadors meet with staff to discuss some of the issues that are bothering students and discuss how to fix them. The students in this group have even organized a meeting in the past to inform teachers of what they would like to see done in peace circles before the school year even starts. This meeting shows the initiative and responsibility this group of students feels towards improving their school. Besides the responsibility these students feel, it also shows that they know they cannot make changes alone and that they need the staff to help them make an impact. With peer ambassadors working with staff, it provides both students and teachers with a voice in how the school should be run and can dramatically affect the school environment.

Personal Interviews

The final part in the evaluation of peace circles within Monroe High School is the face-to-face interviews with members of Partners in Restorative Initiatives and

administrators and teachers within the school. The interviews were a method at gaining insight into how peace circles truly function in Monroe, how they have affected the school, and lastly where they saw peace circles going in the future. Each question also reveals information on how peace circles were implemented within MHS. To examine these, the fourteen questions were split into five groups.

The questions that were asked ranged in five different categories to provide a broad look at the program while at the same time providing personal experiences and feelings from those involved. The first category of questions pertained to the general role and description of the program. This provides insight into how the program functions and what it was designed to impact. The second set of questions were more specific, asking the teachers, administration, and PiRI staff how they had been impacted by the program and how they see the program affecting others such as students. The next category pertained to an evaluation of the program, whether it is successful at its original goal or what it is not doing well. The fourth category of questions asked specifically about the impact the program has had upon the school and the students. This category is where many of the questions about delinquency and school environment were asked. Lastly, questions were asked about what lessons have been taken away from the program and how it is going to be modified in the future. Each category provides an overview of the program as a whole, but also gets to the questions that will provide insight into its actual impact. Labeling theory and strain theory guided the questions that were asked in this portion and provide an idea of whether the program addresses many of the issues each theory raises. Each category breaks up the questions and gives them a discernable purpose towards the evaluation process.

The questions within this study were asked verbatim and only provoking statements such as “why” or “how” were used to gain further information on the subject. Some questions were not answered by those interviewed due to the individual either not knowing or not having a conclusive answer. Due to the small sample size the answers will be given in a generalized form in order to not reveal which group the individual was from. The questionnaire can be found at the end of the document as Appendix 1.

The questionnaire begins with asking the individual what the main goal is in using peace circles within Monroe High School. Answers to this question were all very similar, in that building a better community was essential. One respondent stated that a better community was built through creating relationships. Such relationships as described would be developed once an environment was made comfortable, safe, and a feeling of trust was present. Each respondent made it clear that peace circles were put in place to help facilitate this new environment, to help create the levels of respect, trust, and safety to build a better school climate.

As mentioned earlier, many such programs are modeled after specific theories. This was a main reason for asking whether the peace circle program within Monroe High School was modeled after any specific research or theory. No specific theory was mentioned by any respondent, although one stated that it had a great deal in common with labeling theory. This individual stated that pre-conceived notions between African-American and Hispanic students caused a great deal of distrust due to language barriers. Peace circles were stated as diffusing this distrust after these notions were dispelled in circle. Once those students found out that their pre-conceived ideas were wrong much of the feuding between the two groups ceased to exist. Other than labeling theory, a main

response was that of taking examples from indigenous populations. These populations have provided much of what PiRI current practices entail. Such examples include allowing everyone to have a voice and for the process to be rooted in respect. Another value taken from such aboriginal cultures is for discipline to lead in the right direction, not to punish just for the sake of punishment. This means that punishments should help the offender towards improved behavior rather than just making a student feel guilty.

Peace circles are one restorative practice out of many and it is an interesting question on why they were chosen over another alternative, if any. A requirement within Monroe to fulfill was that of the Olweus Bullying Program. This program simply requires that some sort of practice needs to be implemented within the school that helps to prevent bullying. Peace circles became a response to this requirement. Once the idea was presented to Monroe by Partners in Restorative Initiatives, the school found it to be a good fit. Besides peace circles no other program was ever considered according to the respondents. The peace circle program was started in the summer of 2007 and everyone was trained by the following year.

The last question within the general description category asks how students were placed into circles and if students of different grades were ever mixed. According to respondents each student picked their top desired mentors, or teachers that they desired to be in a circle. Almost every student received their desired mentor. Currently each student meets in peace circles with their mentor every other Friday. Previously, students would sit in classroom peace circles every third Friday and did not get to pick their mentor. Students can be mixed; however, the lower grades tend to be placed together. The reason for this is that prior mixing of student led to the “corruption” of younger

students and also many older students found the lower grades to be too immature. Peace circles within Monroe currently have ten students per one teacher which is seen as being ideal or at least close to it. Lastly, peace circles are still allowed to be conducted in class as well, but are more commonly seen with their mentors on the scheduled day.

When asked about the programs impact upon the individual, each person responded positively; however they all had concerns. Each person cited that the program was like nothing else they had seen before. Most stated that the students were the main part of why they enjoyed peace circles. They stated that they enjoyed the peace circles when students shared stories, got involved within the group, seeing them open up on serious issues and mainly seeing the fun they had in the practice. The respondents stated that peace circles furthered relationships with staff and knowing the difference it has made was rewarding. Some of the concerns presented however included a desire for peace circles to take hold quicker, meaning that their impact would be felt faster and that the support for the program would be present to a larger degree. Another concern was over state requirements and that a great deal of time was taken away from peace circles.

The perceived impact on others such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents appeared to be a positive one. Some of the responses included stating that the impact was “powerful” and that relationships have improved between all of those mentioned. Respondents said that communication was a key element that peace circles helped facilitate that has enhanced such relationships. One individual stated that some teachers did not enjoy the use of peace circles; however, they stated that it has had an impact upon attitudes of all of those who try it. Three of those interviewed even stated

that parents have seen improvements in their child's behavior and that their family discussions outside of school have also improved.

The next question asked the person if they enjoyed using peace circles. The respondents all stated that they enjoyed using peace circles, but acknowledged some observed drawbacks. One respondent declared that time is always an issue in that teachers are pressured due to state requirements. Another issue that was raised was that of the actual scheduled time for peace circles. Friday afternoons were seen as a difficult time to conduct peace circles as students were often rambunctious and could not focus as easily due to it being the final hours of the day and right before the weekend. The students were said to look forward to the time for circles, but often lost the focus necessary after a short while. One of the main issues seems to be the lack of time in an ordinary day to fit in peace circles other than when they are specifically scheduled.

When asked if there had been any successes to the program there was a wide variety of responses. One positive result was from the winning of the Princeton Prize in Race Relations in 2010 by a Monroe Peer Ambassador. The student received the award for describing her efforts within the program and how she is working towards creating a better school environment through facilitating peace circles and the Student Ambassador Program. Another success was that students were becoming more involved within peace circles in co-facilitation, but also within community conferences because of it. Students not only participated within circles, but served as community members within conferences that discussed specific student conduct issues. Teachers were described as coming together to become well organized compared to years past where communication was nonexistent. Peace circles were cited for helping shape student attitudes by not

specifically placing blame on delinquent students. Instead, peace circles raise issues that affect everyone in the school the discussions result in students expressing desire for general behaviors such as bullying to stop. This shaping was cited by a respondent for improving student behavior and classes that were difficult to handle.

The second question within the evaluation of the program section asked if there had been any problems with the program or issues that peace circles had difficulty addressing. A major issue that has developed is that of evaluation itself. A formal evaluation of the program has not been conducted and would be useful to find out the true impact of the program. Another issue cited was starting with too serious of topics within circles and not beginning with more fun activities. This mistake began peace circles on a rough start, but has improved since then. In its implementation, peace circles were stated as being undermined by certain staff members who did not desire to take part in the program. Over time such undermining has declined for the most part, but issues still arise with teachers who are not trained within the program. A problem that was mentioned in regards to students was that of attendance. Truancy is a major problem at Monroe and it is difficult to get students involved and to build trust if they are not in school. The other problem as cited before is that of New York State requirements such as regents. Such requirements hold teachers to a strict curriculum and make it difficult to fit in extra time for peace circles.

The next question of the survey asked how students have responded to the training of the ambassador program. Responses were universal in stating that they have positively responded and that students wanted to be nominated to the program. The ambassador program created a goal for students and it has become highly desired. The

ambassador's were cited as participating in the Green Sweep Program which is a program where they cleaned up their local neighborhood. The group has shown to take initiative both in school and within their community. Partners in Restorative Initiative's also offers a two week long training, one at the PiRI offices and one at a camp. The camp allows for students to build relationships, have fun, and at the same time learn how to be leaders within their school and community.

When asked if the peace circle training has helped the respondents once again the answers were unanimously in that they had. The training was cited to help build relationships and showed students that teachers and staff cared for them since they took the time to go through the training. Other respondents stated that the process is inspiring and re-energizes ones spirits.

In examining the impact on the school through asking about the school atmosphere once peace circles became implemented, the responses were similar to what past studies have found. Most of the respondents stated that it had decreased issues such as fights, suspensions, and arrests. Another important issue that was resolved was that of fear. An individual mentioned that the feeling of the school improved, that the level of fear decreased and feelings of safety increased. One respondent was not sure if the program had gone far enough yet, but was hopeful. This individual stated that the program helps, but was not being used to its full potential to have the significant impact that was desired. Some respondents believed that the results of the program would take another year before the full conclusion could be drawn; however, in the short term numbers had dropped in regards to disruptions, violence, and the general occurrence of problems.

The last section of the questionnaire concluded with the lessons that were learned from the program. The first question in this category was to ask what future goals the program had. Each respondent had an answer that varied. One respondent pointed to sustainability as being a goal for the future. This person stated that sustainability is difficult because keeping people in administrative positions who are supportive of the program does not usually last long. This individual stated that these administrators are often moved to different schools once an impact begins to take hold. Another respondent also stated this as a goal, but mentioned that acquiring grant money was a must in order to train more staff and students. Training of such individuals would ideally be conducted through ten circles and to continue such efforts in the future. The current training of the staff is solely introductory level, but one individual hoped to have the option for staff to receive enhanced training. A differing goal was to ensure that peace circles that had issues with problem students found a resolution. This idea of checking back with staff members who cited problems would improve the chances of the problem being completely resolved and would improve student and teacher satisfaction. Another goal that was cited was to find a model program to emulate. This meant that instead of being a model for other schools, Monroe needs a model of its own to examine so that they could become better. One of the last goals cited was to improve evaluation of the peace circle program.

The last question of the survey asked about what changed in the peace circle program in the past two years. The respondents stated that peace circles had increased in availability, meaning that they used to be every three weeks and now they occurred every other week. Another adjustment was seen in that almost everyone within the school has

been trained. The majority of people being trained had improved the understanding of how peace circles work, but also the knowledge that pleasant topics were needed to begin circles instead of starting with serious topics. Another individual mentioned that when peace circles began everyone appeared to be going through the process alone, but steadily the environment has changed to where people are working together.

The responses seen from this questionnaire find many of the same positives and negatives with peace circle programs seen through the literature. Issues that arise within past research and were mentioned within this study include a constant difficulty in managing time. Peace circles demand time in order to be truly effective and due to state requirements such time is highly coveted. Another issue raised is that of sustainability. Sustainability is difficult with such a program due to the constant changing in administrative positions in urban city schools. Without support from administrators the program will not function and could lose its standing within the school. Another issue related to sustainability is that of funding. To find support for such a program it must show evidence that it truly works and saves money in the long run. Showing such evidence is difficult without a complete analysis and such an analysis would cost money.

A problem that is often overlooked relates to the subject matter within the peace circle. Often times programs fail to achieve their goal by being too overzealous for results. This was brought up in the early stages of peace circles being used in Monroe when they started with serious topics instead of a fun beginning that would have catered to building trust. These issues have all been cited as problems that can cause programs to fall short of their goals or ones that hinder the program from gaining enough support to last for a long period of time.

Even with the negatives and concerns brought up from the interviews, there are numerous positives. The program has been credited with bringing together a disorganized school that lacked communication amongst staff members. Through new administration and staff that supported the idea of peace circles and implemented the program, the school has been altered into one that emphasizes respect, safety, and communication. With the staff working together as a team, they have begun to take the peace circle program in stride. Peace circles within the school have been said to decrease violence, detentions, pre-conceived notions, and fear. Students have shown initiative through efforts in the Student Ambassador Program that not only shows leadership within their school, but in the community. These students have taken responsibility for the behavior in Monroe and are working with teachers to enhance the school environment. These efforts have not gone unnoticed as with the Princeton Prize in Race Relations given to a Peer Ambassador. Such success shows that the program is indeed having a noticeable impact upon the school, its staff, and its students. There will always be obstacles to overcome; however, if students, teachers, and administrators continue working towards the same goal, issues of communication, violence, and safety can be overcome through peace circles.

Analysis

In regards to theories, hypotheses were developed as mentioned previously in the methods section. The hypotheses cannot be examined quantitatively as this study did not have access to such information, but instead can be interpreted through observations and

the questionnaire responses in the previous section. The seven hypotheses are displayed below.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived delinquency.

H₁: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease overall perceptions of delinquency.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived school fights.

H₂: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease perceptions of school fights.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived detention rates.

H₃: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease perceptions of detention rates.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived suspension rates.

H₄: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease perceptions of suspension rates.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived student referrals to the administration.

H₅: Peace circles within Monroe High School decrease perceptions of student referrals to the administration.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no perceived impact upon those involved with the program.

H₆: Peace circles within Monroe High School have had a perceived positive impact in those involved with the program.

H₀: Peace circles within Monroe High School have no impact upon perceived student communication.

H₇: Peace circles within Monroe High School have increased the perception of student communication.

The first hypothesis dictated that peace circles should have shown a perceived decrease in overall delinquency. Based on responses to the interview questions I asked, it is apparent that each individual believes the issue of delinquency has been impacted. This result is the same for the next four hypotheses that dictated there would be decreases in fights, detention, suspension, and administrative referrals. Each of these issues of

delinquency was cited by respondents one or multiple times as being on the decline. Actual statistics are expected within the next year and those interviewed expect decreases in each area. This is corroborated through observational data from the Peer Ambassador Training, where students stated that bullying, violence, and fear had declined. Each respondent stated that the school environment improved through enhanced communication and safety that began developing through the use of peace circles. With this information, it appears that peace circles have decreased the perception of overall delinquency in regards to fights, detention rates, suspension rates, and also administrative referrals. The extent of the decline in delinquency is unclear; however, there is evidence that peace circles are viewed as improving many aspects that once plagued Monroe High School.

When hypothesizing that peace circles would have a positive impact on those involved it was believed that participation would improve the social environment and relationships between teachers and students. The students within the Peer Ambassador Program that were observed shared that they respected teachers more due to the level of understanding that had been created through the use of peace circles. These students stated that they felt more comfortable opening up toward teachers and believed that their voice was being heard. On the opposite side, all respondents to the questionnaire stated that they saw better communication between students and teachers. With this communication came a feeling of respect and community that was not present prior to the implementation of peace circles. Respondents stated that they often felt “reenergized” and “proud” of being part of such a program due to the impact they have seen it have. For these reasons it is clear that the program has indeed had a positive impact on

everyone involved. This finding relates well to the last hypothesis in stating that peace circles would increase student communication.

Student communication was cited by those interviewed as a serious issue within Monroe High School for years. A source for such lack of communication was due to the large amount of transience and also the language barrier. This meant that Monroe High School commonly welcomed new students throughout the year while at the same time saw others leaving the school and community. This transient behavior made it difficult for students to build lasting relationships with teachers, but also with peers.

The language barrier between those students who spoke English and those who spoke Spanish caused students to form pre-conceived notions about others they did not understand, resulting in feuding within the school. These issues were directly addressed by peace circles. First, new students became quickly acclimated by being involved within a peace circle and the resulting participation helped develop relationships with fellow students. Monroe used the practice of peace circles to help eliminate any pre-conceived notions students may have had.

Peace circles allowed for students to participate with activities and to share personal stories. The shared communication created greater understanding among students of different races and ethnicities. For this reason, communication between students has improved. A respondent mentioned that issues among students are now settled through a peace circle type atmosphere, where each person has a voice. This type of communication was not present before peace circles and is another reason for the improved school environment. Peace circles have indeed increased student communication. Even with the positives discussed there are issues with the program in

MHS and are clearly seen upon examining how peace circles were implemented within the school.

An issue with many programs that is discussed by Rossi and Wright is that of implementation failure. They state that a lack of impact within a program is possibly due to “inadequate program design, faulty implementation of the program, misunderstandings of the participants’ actual needs, or insufficient development of program concepts prior to implementation” (Rossi & Wright, 1984, p. 348). They go on further to state that examining implementation is critical towards a comprehensive study as it could be the source of a program not living up to the expectations. By examining the implementation of peace circles within Monroe High School this study will be more comprehensive and be able to understand the results of the evaluation to a larger degree.

Since literature has shown that peace circles can have positive results if used and implemented properly, one would hope to create such a program as close to the ideal settings as possible. Using peace circles in an ideal fashion would demand a great deal of time and buy-in from inside and outside of the school. A significant amount of time is needed to get the teachers and administration on board with such a program. This time would be dedicated to helping everyone understand the function of peace circles and for them to accept the need for their use within the school. Ideally, every teacher and administrator within MHS would be trained in both the basic training, but also the more advanced training offered by PiRI. Such training would ensure that everyone within the school is confident with the practice of peace circles and that everyone is using the approach properly. In an ideal setting, such training would also be available to the

Monroe Peer Ambassadors. Lastly, peace circles would not be taking place every other week, but would occur in a more frequent manner such as a daily basis.

With teachers, administrators, and ambassadors trained as best as possible, the program would run as designed. Having peace circles everyday would allow for students and teachers to get used to the program and rely upon it. With such a design, theory would dictate that there would be lower levels of strain and labeling due to a rise in communication. School issues would also decrease due to a consistent and heavy reliance upon peace circles over the use of detention, suspension, or administrator referrals. Having every person within the school working towards improving the school through peace circles with ideal settings would have the drastic effects the school hopes for. The ideal scenario is not possible due to cost in both time and money, but also in human error. Teachers and administrators are bound to make mistakes and it cannot be avoided, therefore examining how close MHS comes to implementing the ideal settings for peace circles will enhance any results found within my research.

Within Monroe High School peace circles are scheduled to occur for a little over an hour every other Friday. Other than the scheduled two week peace circle, teachers are allowed to use the practice within their classroom. The personal interviews within the next section found that peace circles were not used as often as desired due to state and school demands. The teachers are pressured by the state and school to prepare their students for the New York State Regents exams at the end of the year. These tests limit what a teacher can add to a heavily scripted curriculum, which often does not include time for peace circles. This problem of not having enough time to use peace circles shows the first implementation issue. As stated previously, an ideal scenario would have

peace circles being used daily; however, the school only requiring one session per two weeks is not close. Limited time and a lack of push from the school has caused peace circles to be an afterthought. Having peace circles every other week is an upgrade from the previous year which only had them every third week; however, this will not achieve the results the school desires.

Upon examining the survey given by MHS discussed in the next section, there is a sizable difference between grade levels and their beliefs that peace circles would improve the school. The seventh and eighth graders were more likely to agree that peace circles improved MHS. The eleventh and twelfth graders were of the opposite opinion, having a greater percentage disagreeing with the statement that peace circles were improving Monroe High School. This result could point to another issue with implementation. It is possible that peace circles within MHS are not fun for older students. It is possible that the lower grade levels have a greater amount of free time within classes to conduct peace circles compared to higher grade levels. State requirements such as the New York State Regents exams may decrease the amount of time teachers have to use peace circles in higher grade levels solely due to the amount of time devoted to teaching towards such tests. If this is the case the design for peace circles to be fun and enjoyable does not seem to be taking hold when examining the older students' survey results.

Since positive results have been reported from high schools as mentioned previously, something about Monroe High School's use of peace circles is not working for older students. An issue that was mentioned within many of the personal interviews was that peace circles within MHS were not centered around fun and enjoyable activities. PiRI trains teachers and students in using entertaining peace circle topics to spur

discussion and break the ice within the group. Ideally this technique is to be used numerous times to make peace circles a fun activity before ever discussing serious topics such as violence or school related problems. The personal interviews made it clear that peace circle within MHS started around serious topics rather than fun topics. This can be simply human error in teachers not being fully trained in the practice, but it did not start the program off well. Currently, with the minimal time allotted to peace circles, serious topics are usually a decent portion of the scheduled time. It is possible that serious topics are causing the older students to see it as less enjoyable and therefore not helping. This relates directly to a problem with implementation. Peace circles are designed to be fun and engaging for everyone. If enjoyment is decreasing as each grade level progresses then something is flawed within its use at MHS. Providing more time for peace circles would decrease the reliance for serious topics to be discussed as often, therefore a greater amount of time can be dedicated towards making the practice fun.

Peace circles have been successfully adapted as an approach to alleviate the pressure of solely relying on punishment within schools. While interviewed, many individuals discussed with me how there were often inconsistencies on how students were punished. These individuals stated that some students were allowed to discuss problems in peace circles or community conferences while others received detention or suspension. Ideally peace circles and other restorative programs would be used completely rather than resorting to strict punishment. The process is not truly restorative if the program in place is never used. Under restorative justice ideals, punishment would only be used as a last resort when the restorative programs did not work for the individual. MHS being inconsistent with behavioral problems sends a mixed message to teachers and students.

Being consistent is important to building trust within the school and relying solely on restorative practices would develop a system revolving around communication over punishment. With consistency, communication, and regular use of restorative practices, the school in theory would see lower issues of violence and an improved environment.

Monroe High School had PiRI implement peace circles within the school to solve numerous issues surrounding safety, communication, and delinquency. Everyone stated through interviews that problems within the school had improved, but that there was still a ways to go. Results from the survey that the school gave out to their students and teachers show many of these issues. To reach the positive results seen in previous literature, the school needs to take steps to make peace circles a central part to the school. Problems arise over having enough time and also being able to train teachers to a higher degree, but there are steps that can be taken. The school may have to rely on the training the basic training the teachers currently have due to costs, but to make the program work more time must be dedicated to the practice. Having circles everyday may not be feasible, but twenty minutes per day or a half hour every other day would be a vast improvement than the current time allotted. Implementing peace circles within MHS to as close to the ideal scenario is a must in order to see the desired results. The practice needs to be modified to ensure that students within every grade enjoy the program and that can only be done with a greater usage of time and using entertaining topics of discussion over serious topics. The issues raised over implementation are outlined within Appendix 3, where a chart has been designed to compare how peace circles are used within schools mentioned in the literature review compared to MHS. This chart is a reference for this section and serves to summarize the overall concerns and consequences

to how MHS implemented peace circles within the school. Overall, this chart portrays the ideal methods for implementing a successful peace circle program based on prior research. This chart was developed through the survey analysis, personal observation, and interviews within MHS. Such information allowed for a list to be crafted displaying how the implementation of peace circles differed from successful programs. As Rossi and Wright stated, examining the implementation of a program is crucial in understanding the positives or shortcomings that are presented within research. Along with the research previously discussed, this chart adds increased depth and is a key component to the analysis of peace circles within Monroe High School.

Lessons Learned

With any type of research there are inherent lessons learned. These lessons can range from the methods used in attaining information to what the collected data shows. This information is valuable for both an evaluation and to help guide other research in the future. With recommendations, future research may succeed in areas where past studies have faltered. Research on this subject can always be improved with enough time and money, but also in the study's methods. This section is important in showing any difficulties or areas that could be improved upon if this study is to be used as a guide.

One of the first areas that require attention is the research design used in this study. Without having access to school disciplinary records it was not feasible to provide the quantitative data that is needed to show peace circles effect. Ideally this data would be examined with such a qualitative study to make firm conclusions. Combining both areas would allow for findings to be generalized to a certain degree. Using both

qualitative and quantitative data will provide the necessary evidence for other schools or programs to follow if the results are positive. If further research is conducted within this area, both types of data should be examined.

Due to the time constraint on gaining consent from parents and children, students were not interviewed or surveyed within this study. Students are one of the most ideal groups to examine in such a study as they are the ones who should be affected the most by the peace circle program. Further research should look at the impact the program has on students specifically and with enough time this is feasible. Again, both qualitative and quantitative research could be used. Ideally students would have been given a lengthy survey to assess the differences seen in the school surrounding violence and safety. Through multiple questions the responses would have been able to be coded and results would have been easier to interpret. This would give any research in this area further validation. Such a study would be difficult due to the amount of consent needed, but the results would be highly valuable.

With the questionnaire given to students, it should have also been given to teachers and administrators. Conducting open ended research questions with teachers is helpful in gaining a feel for the programs overall effectiveness, but is not specific enough to make firm conclusions. For this reason, a survey should have been given to the teachers and administrators that, much like the students, examined their views on the violence levels and safety of the school since the implementation of peace circles. A major problem that arose was the time constraints that made it difficult for teachers and staff to sit down and talk about the program. Another reason for the difficulty in gaining access interviews was incentive. Since this study is obviously voluntary, many staff did

not desire or could not give up any of their free time. This is a difficulty with any research project, but harms this study in a few ways.

Through difficulty in communication and time constraints, the number of individuals to be interviewed decreased and the resulting interviews were from four face-to-face interviews. Ideally those interviewed would have been split into two or three groups to be analyzed. Originally the results of the groups interviewed outside of the school would have been examined in comparison to those inside of the school. If all interviews were conducted to the desired degree, the groups could have been split into the opinions of teachers, administrators, and PiRI; however this could not occur. The four subjects interviewed contained members from the three groups that were desired, but for the sake of anonymity those interviewed were grouped together and the number of interviews from each group cannot be disclosed. This means that the answers to each question were reported within this study in a general sense. No information was reported in a way that reveals if the individual works inside the school or outside due to the small sample size. Reporting data in such a way could identify the individual and cause repercussions if their response is viewed as undesirable. For this reason, the data could not be evaluated to the degree desired during the early stages of research planning for ethical reasons, but it still provided valuable insight into the program.

An issue with surveying only four individuals is obviously the small amount of subjects questioned. This sample size is not great enough to make a large generalization about the peace circle program within the school. Secondly, this sample size was not chosen at random as volunteers were asked through mass e-mail from a mediator within the school. This is problematic as it could have possibly provided me with only those

staff members who either find the program highly useful and successful or who are on the opposite perspective in disliking its use, both of whom may have a desire to talk on the subject.

Such research should ideally be conducted through a random sample so that the group is representative of the school. The research conducted in this manner is good at bringing up many of the positives and negatives of the program, but does not provide true representation of the school. To counter this, further research would need greater access to the school, including lists of teachers and what grades they teach. These teachers could be then split up into grade levels and then randomly selected to be interviewed. This would be one more step in removing human bias or error from this type of research.

A method that was not considered within this study, but that could have been done was to observe and interview other schools that were using such a program. There are currently other schools with Rochester, NY that are beginning the process of implementing peace circles. Observing such schools may have provided further insight into what makes such a program more effective. If one school uses different techniques or methods, a researcher could at least make note of it within their study. Such differences within a program could affect the outcomes within a school such as fights or communication levels. Going further and interviewing some of the faculty could also provide insight into the average views towards such a program at its start up point. A researcher could even conduct a longitudinal study of such a school and examine peace circles effectiveness over a few years. Such additions to this study would have improved the research, but would require a great deal of time. One of the other lessons learned from this study are based around the questions.

There are numerous lessons learned on how to make this study better and to maximize the findings. As with other studies, many issues arise due to time. Future research could be easily done if there was enough time for gaining the necessary consent, conducting both qualitative and quantitative surveys and lastly to analyze the findings. This study was unable to gain the consent or participation needed to go as in depth as desired, but can at least provide insight into the impact of peace circles and also help guide any future research.

Conclusion

Peace circles are a relatively new addition to restorative practices; however, they have been around a long time among indigenous people. Currently peace circles do not have a great deal of literature or studies examining their effectiveness. This issue is mainly due to their relative infancy within the criminal justice system and society. Peace circles being relatively new to society has caused a lack of knowledge on the subject within communities. Many individuals have begun to learn of restorative justice approaches such as drug courts, but most are still not familiar with peace circles. This lack of knowledge of the community does not lend itself to being supportive when such a program is implemented. For this reason many of the problems cited within literature and the current study begin to unfold.

The implementation of peace circles within Monroe High School differs from that of many of the schools examined in the previous literature. When examining the differences in implementation between schools that have shown positive results to MHS, there are concerns that develop. Many of the concerns and consequences discussed

below are compiled into a chart found in Appendix 3. This chart outlines the key differences between MHS and successful schools mentioned in the literature review. The contents of this chart display what MHS does similarly and what it needs to adjust in order to implement peace circles in the same manner as model schools.

Sustainability is an issue that can cause even the most effective program to be shut down. If schools do not have enough funding for all the programs that are desired within the school, often it is the program with the least understanding that is cut. Most of the successful schools discussed earlier have grants that finance their use of peace circles. Since MHS does not have a grant that fully covers the program there are constant fears of losing peace circles. Peace circles are not well known which means it may be the first program to be cut if there is not enough money to support it along with others.

This same reasoning applies to the ability of the school in keeping skilled administrators. Peace circles require the support of the administration and its staff. If an administrator is seen as helping a once problematic school thrive, then that administrator may be moved to a different school. The reason behind this is that many urban schools are seen as secondary in regards to suburban schools; therefore talented staff members generally do not last as long in urban inner-city schools before they are often moved to suburban schools.

A major problem within urban schools is the constant removal of such skilled staff members is a main reason why many city schools suffer from delinquency and academic issues. If new administration enters the school, teacher support and support for peace circles could lose its standing. For these reasons, peace circle programs are difficult to keep running for multiple years let alone conduct any significant research on

the program within that small window of opportunity. If implemented properly and met with the needed support, peace circle programs can have a positive impact.

The current training provided to teachers and administration within the school is adequate at conducting peace circles; however ideally the training would be more extensive. A more intensive training would allow for the school to perform peace circles closer to the ideal method. Such training would expect to improve results from peace circles and bring them closer to other model schools.

In an ideal setting peace circles would be used on a daily basis. The schools that show success in decreasing delinquency have all shown use of peace circles daily. Currently MHS mandates that peace circles are used every other Friday which is far from ideal. Teachers and staff have cited that they use circles when they can, but this is not the daily usage that is desirable for large results.

PiRI has recently employed the use of Peace Circles within classrooms including the Monroe High School, School #39, School #29, and the Avon School District within Rochester, NY (“Partners in Restorative,” 2009). The efforts hope to create a better sense of community within each school. To accomplish this, the program hopes to build bonds between the students and the staff. If this can be done, PiRI hopes that the main issue of each problem will be addressed through restorative practices rather than relying on traditional methods of punishment (“Partners in Restorative,” 2009). This notion is seen through PiRI’s vision of “a world where restorative principles and practices are known, respected and used to redress harm, restore peace, improve relationships, reduce violence, promote healing and build healthy communities” (“Vision and Mission,” 2008). This notion can help improve schools as seen through the literature; however, the

program needs sufficient development and proper implementation as dictated by Rossi and Wright, in order to succeed (Rossi & Wright, 1984).

Monroe High School is a prime example of the impact peace circle programs can have, but at the same time showing how peace circles can function without being implemented to an ideal degree. Before peace circles, the school had issues with academic achievement, delinquency, and concerns over safety. In collaboration with PiRI, Monroe High School was able to steadily create a safer environment that catered to learning. The resulting years followed with academic improvement, increased rates of attendance, and decreases in violence. Peace circles have seen a decline in student bullying and improved communication within all aspects of the school. These results have only been stated verbally and also the magnitude of the results was said to be moderate. This leads to the interpretation that peace circles are having an effect, but could be a much bigger one if handled properly. Since peace circles are not functioning in their ideal settings or being used in the proper manner, the results will not be as significant as prior literature has shown leading to the belief that there has been an implementation failure.

Through observation and responses to the questionnaire, it is apparent that there are issues that arise from such a program, but they are manageable. Many respondents stated that it was difficult to find enough time to devote to the practice. This problem can become an issue if the program is not given enough time to function or if teachers feel too much pressure from state regulations. This is an implementation problem that needs to be adjusted in order to attain the desired results. Making peace circles an integral part of the school programming would vastly affect the results seen. Even though this was

stated to be a problem, the peace circle program has shown positive results even though the time allocation is not to the degree that is desired. From this, one can interpret that greater amounts of time devoted to the practice would only enhance the effect it already has within the school environment.

The peace circle program within Monroe High School has never been fully evaluated. A full evaluation would consist of the ideal methodology described in past sections and would provide the school and PiRI with valuable information on the effectiveness of the program. Conducting research in a purely qualitative manner decreases the weight of this study and firm conclusions cannot be stated as they would be with both qualitative and quantitative data. The information found within this research however provides further insight into the practices of peace circles and their application within schools. Monroe High School has shown an improvement from previous years, but one that needs to be analyzed quantitatively to state the true impact of the program. Based on survey analysis, personal observations, and face-to-face interviews, it is clear that peace circles have had a dramatic impact upon Monroe High School. With such data it cannot be said how significant the impact is in actual statistics; however, the impact can be heard through student and staff descriptions of the change they have seen. The improvement has taken a school once at risk and developed it into one that has ideals rooted in respect and understanding. If an effort is made to continually make peace circles a central part to the school, relying upon it daily and for its restorative purposes, Monroe High School could see a much greater positive change than what they have seen up to this point.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Official Questionnaire

General Role and Description of the Program

1. What was the main goal of using peace circles within Monroe High School?
2. Is the program modeled after specific research or theories?
3. Why were peace circles chosen to be used within the school over other alternatives?
(What others)
4. How are students placed into certain circles?
 - a. Are students mixed with other grades?

Individual Impact on Person and Others

5. How has the program impacted you individually?
6. What is the impact among others within the school?
 - a. Administration?
 - b. Teachers?
 - c. Students?
 - d. Parents?
7. Do you enjoy using peace circles in class? (Why)

Evaluation of the Program

8. Have there been any successes and what are they?
9. Have there been any problems with the program?
 - a. Problems in the school that peace circles have trouble addressing?
10. How have the students responded to the training in the ambassador program?
11. Has the peace circle training helped?
 - a. How so?

Impact on the School

12. Has the atmosphere in the school changed since using peace circles?
 - a. Fights?
 - b. Detentions?
 - c. Suspensions?

Lessons Learned

13. What are some of the future goals of the program?

14. How has the program changed just in the past two years?

Appendix 2

R·I·T

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects in Research
141 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, New York 14623-5604
Phone: 585-475-7673
Fax: 585-475-7990
Email: hmfsrs@rit.edu

Form C IRB Decision Form

TO: Christian Isaac; LaVerne Williams
FROM: RIT Institutional Review Board
DATE: February 3, 2011
RE: Decision of the RIT Institutional Review Board

Project Title – Restorative Justice within Schools: An Examination of Peace Circles within Monroe High School

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has taken the following action on your project named above.

☒ Exempt 46.101 (b)(2)

Now that your project is approved, you may proceed as you described in the Form A.

You are required to submit to the IRB any:

- **Proposed** modifications and wait for approval before implementing them,
- Unanticipated risks, and
- Actual injury to human subjects.

Heather Foti, MPH
Associate Director
Office of Human Subjects Research

Revised 10-18-06

Appendix 3

| Schools With Positive Results | Monroe High School | Success? | Consequences? |
|--|---|------------|--|
| Grants | Partially Supported by Grants | No | Creates a lack of Sustainability. The program could be cut if money is lost from the budget. |
| Every Staff Member is Trained | Almost Every Staff Member is Trained | Yes | Using peace circles properly and in a consistent manner. |
| Everyone Was Trained Before Implementation | Very Few Trained Before Implementation | No | Creates a strong foundation. Can lead to negative opinions or failure from the start if enough staff are not trained or trained properly. |
| Everyday Use as a Teaching Tool | Mandatory Every Other Friday and Occasional Classroom Use | No | A lack of use can decrease the likelihood of building trust within the circle and accomplishing the goal of discussing serious issues openly. |
| Starts at 6th Grade | Starts at 7th Grade | Yes | The early it is started, the earlier students become comfortable with the practice. |
| Follow Up | No Follow Up | No | No idea if peace circles solved the problem. Does not take the opportunity to use other restorative practices to solve the problem. |
| Peace Circles are Always an Alternative Option | Peace Circles are Only Used for Certain Instances | No | No specific guideline for handling problems. Students do not know what to expect whether it's punishment or using peace circles. Inconsistencies can cause a lack of buy-in for the program. |
| Begins with a Focus on Fun Topics | Usually Begins with a Focus on Fun Topics | Yes and No | Students can be turned off to using peace circles. Trust within the circle will be to a lower degree if fun topics are not used. Using serious topics immediately can cause peace circles to fail and decrease discussion. |
| Small Group Size (6-8) | Small Group Size (8) | Yes | Small group sizes allow for more in depth discussion and allow for everyone to be involved. |
| Topics: Violence, Drugs, School | Topics: Violence, Drugs, School | Yes | These topics show the areas that peace circles can cover while still having positive results. |
| Never Used as Punishment | Never Used as Punishment | Yes | Punishing students with restorative practices would be against their purpose. This would cause immediate failure. |

The column based on schools with positive results is a compilation of the methods used by schools within the literature review that implemented peace circles. The column on Monroe High School is based on personal observation and interview responses.

Tables

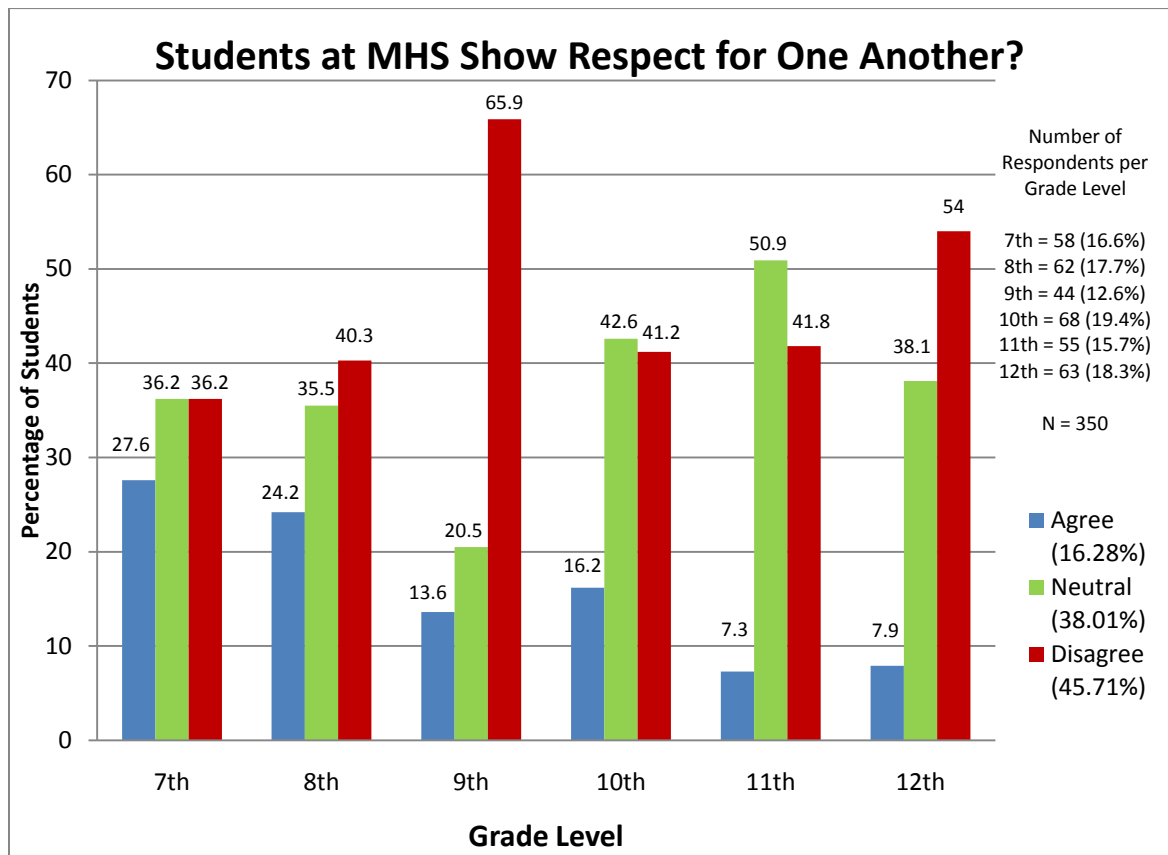


Table 1 (MRS, 2009) 97.7% response rate. The percentages above do not include the percentage who did not respond to this question.

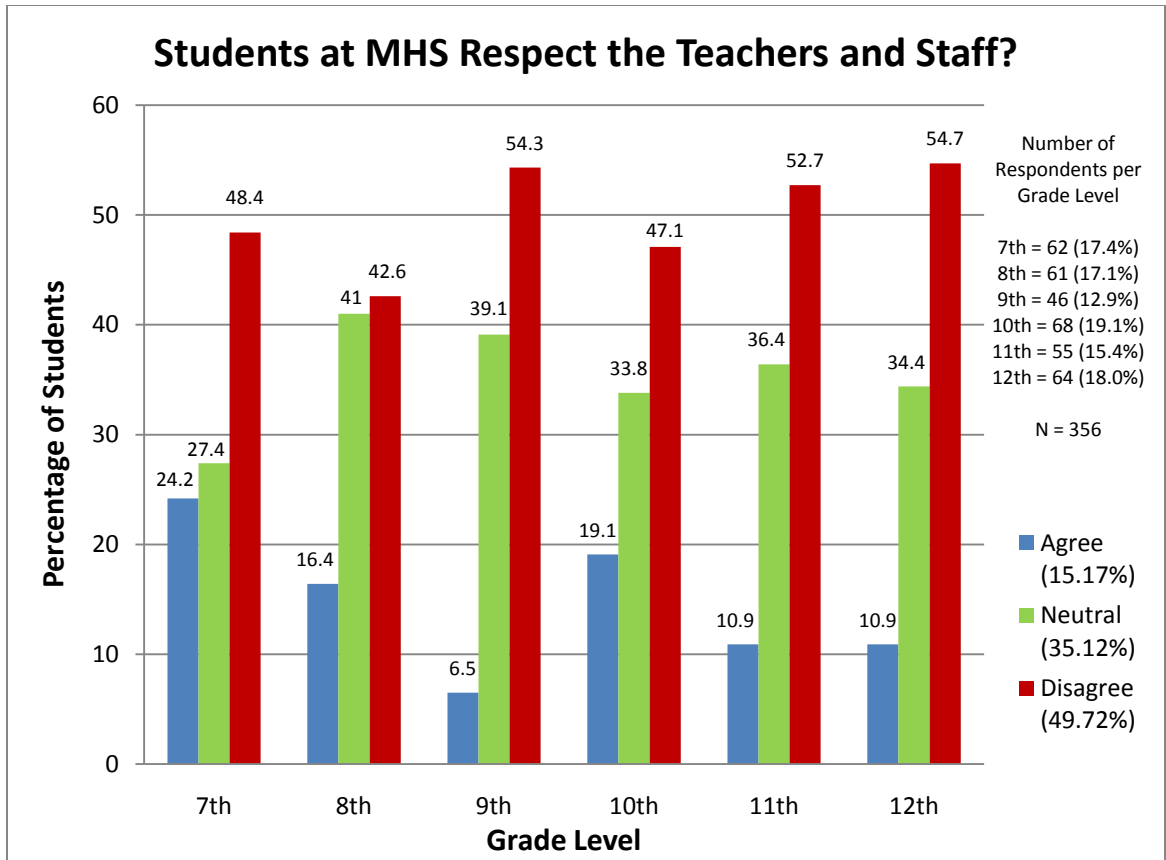


Table 2 (MRS, 2009) 99.4% response rate. The percentages above do not include the percentage who did not respond to this question.

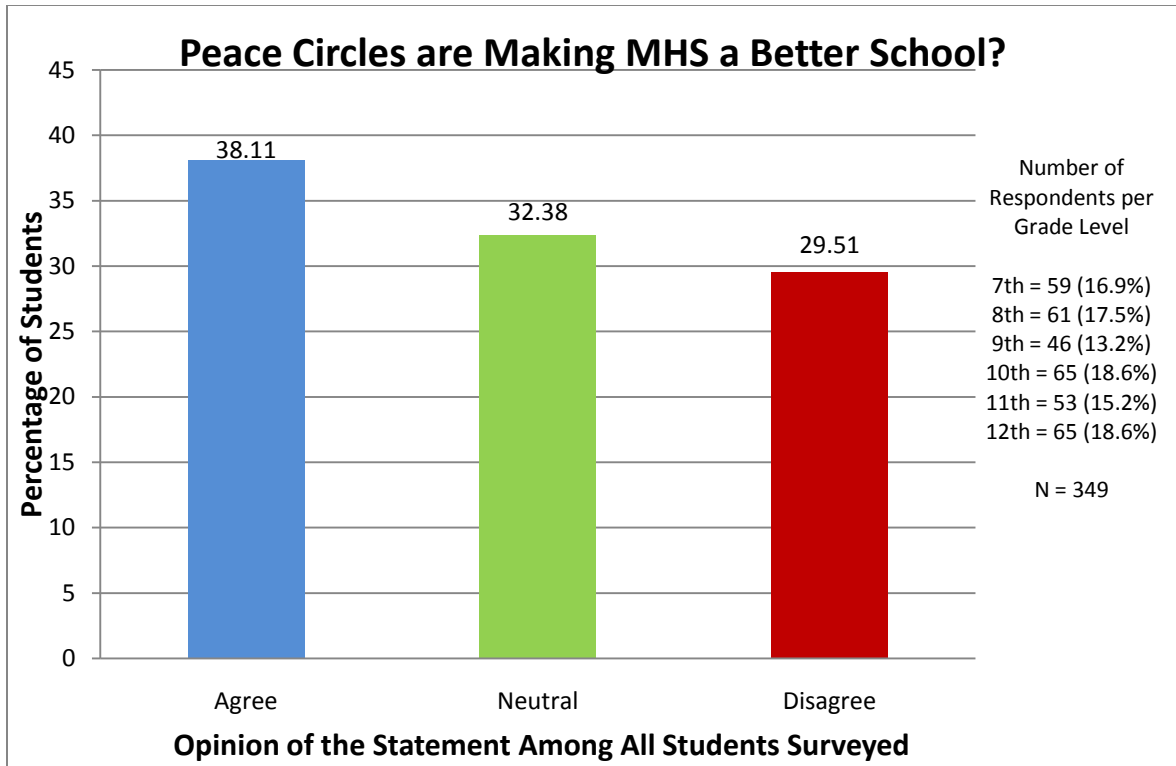


Table 3 (MRS, 2009) 95.5% response rate. The percentages above do not include the percentage who did not respond to this question.

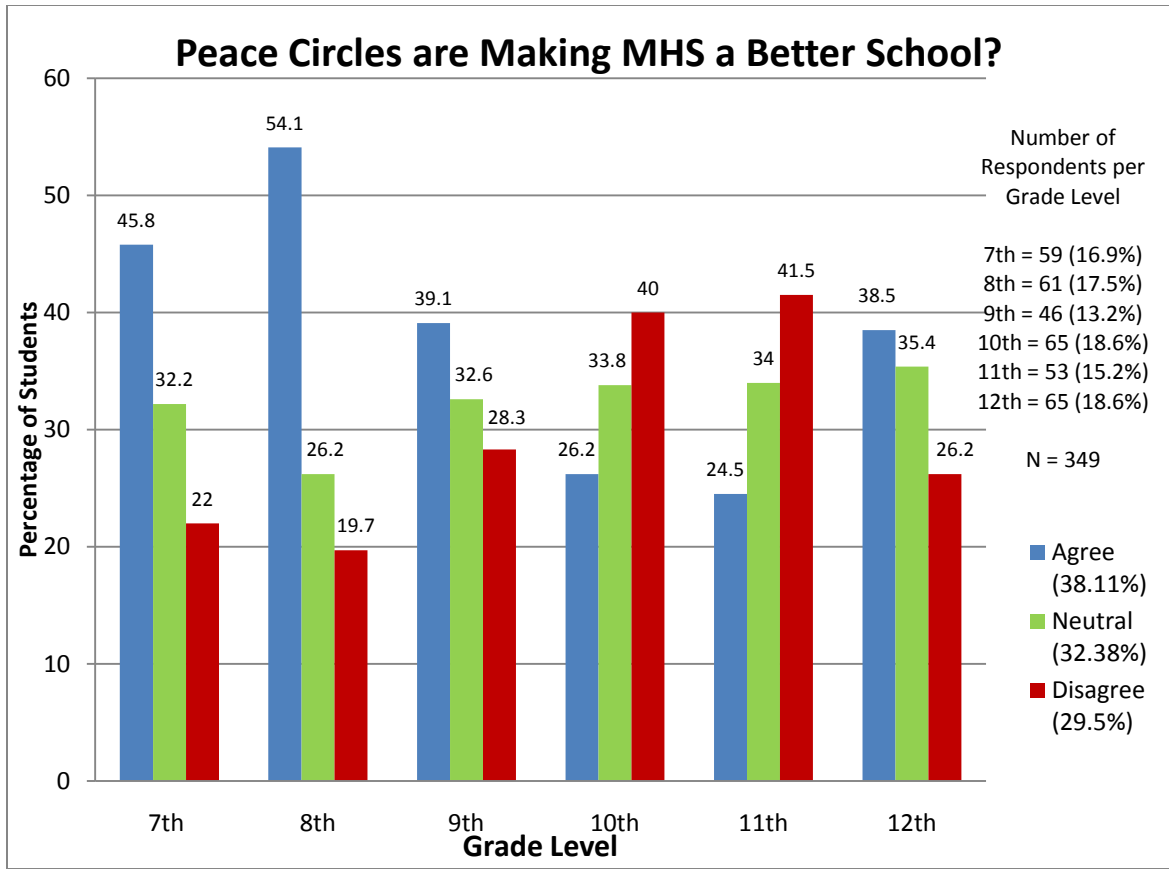


Table 4 (MRS, 2009) 95.5% response rate. The percentages above do not include the percentage who did not respond to this question.